




MISS CHEYNE
OF
ESSILMONT

AUTHOR OF
THE ROMANCE OF WAR





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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT

BY

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“THE ROMANCE OF WAR,” “THE CAMERONIANS,”
“THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER,”
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

CHAPTER I.

TOM LLANYARD.

‘**I**S it love itself,’ asks a writer, ‘or the lover that a young girl thinks most of, when she becomes conscious of this dual existence in her heart? I am inclined to think it is the former. The novelty of her own sensations occupies her more than the person to whom she owes their birth and existence.’

It may be thus with some, but it was *not* so with Alison Cheyne, for she thought of Bevil—Bevil Goring only—as the embodiment of her love and of all she could love.

All idea of going to Madeira had been abandoned, and Cadbury suggested that, after cruising a little in the Channel, they should land in France and visit Paris, Brussels, or some other place, when the change of scene might cause some favourable change in Alison's mind ; and when—he was not without the secret and evil hope of contriving to lose or drop Sir Ranald by the way !

Thus, next morning saw the *Firefly* still hugging the coast of France, and in sight of the Hôtel de Ville of Boulogne, and the hill to the westward thereof, surmounted by the stately column of Napoleon.

Attended by pretty Daisy Prune, who could not make out the situation in any way, so far as her mistress was concerned (and who was the object of much nautical admiration among the yachtsmen forward), Alison came on deck attired in her warm sealskin jacket, with her little hands deep in her muff, and a thick veil tied tightly over her face, and Tom Llanyard hastened

aft to give her his hand to a comfortable seat, to place a hassock under her feet, and wrap a couple of railway rugs around her—all of which he did deftly and ere Lord Cadbury could reach her.

Cadbury and her father were below in the cabin writing letters to be posted on shore; thus, for a time, Alison was left to her own reflections.

Now Tom Llanyard was not unused, we have said, to having ladies on board the *Firefly*; but he knew not what to make of Alison, she was every way, in tone and aspect, so unlike the much be-rouged fair ones with golden locks with whom Cadbury had more than once sought seclusion on the world of waters, or amid the pretty sea-ports of the Mediterranean.

The rich hue of her abundant hair, the pensive sadness of her sweet face, and the extreme gentleness of her voice, all attracted the honest seaman greatly towards her; and she had little hands and feet that a

sculptor might rave about. Her grey-blue, soft, and velvety eyes were gazing dreamily and listlessly at the outlines of the French cliffs with that unseeing expression peculiar to those whose minds are preoccupied.

‘What can she be thinking about?’ surmised Tom, as he drew near, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his short blue pea-jacket. ‘A primrose on the river’s brink will be a good deal to her, no doubt; as a writer has it, “she would romance about it, and poetise about it, and weave all sorts of fantastic stories about it to herself, and it would be a very wonderful primrose indeed before she had done with it.”’

So thought Tom while watching her, but Alison had one idea in her mind—Bevil Goring, and how he would be construing her sudden disappearance.

The monotonous wash of the waves through which the yacht was running, the hum of the wind through the rigging over-

head, and the measured pattering of the reef points on the canvas as the vessel rolled a little, lulled her. That strange sense of a double existence which comes over us at times—especially in those of excitement or sorrow—was with her now, and she seemed to hear the voice of Bevil and be with him again under the shadow of the great beech-trees, where perhaps at that moment he was watching and waiting for her in wonder at her non-appearance, and where so often amid all their love talk he had paid her what a novelist calls ‘the best compliment man can pay woman—that of addressing her as a rational being.’

If they never met again, how should she be able to live through all the years of her life without him? Might it not be that in separation Bevil might cease to love her—might only remember her father’s insulting conduct to him at Chilcote, and in time learn to love some one else, so that if again they met it could only be as strangers?

Strangers ! Then, at the ideas her busy mind conjured up, tears began to ooze slowly from her eyes under the concealment of her veil.

She thought often of the hound she had seen, or imagined she had seen, on that eventful night ; the memory of it haunted her painfully ; and doubtless she would now have dismissed it from her mind as an optical delusion, but for its appearance being so strangely corroborated by Archie stating that the baying of one in the garden had awakened her father.

In her heart at times fear and pity for the latter struggled with passionate resentment at Lord Cadbury as a schemer who had separated her from her lover. Her father's worldliness was, perhaps, far more a matter of habit and education than nature. He was, however, now like most men of rank—Scottish men of rank, more than any in Europe—selfish to the heart's core ; sorry we are to write it, but the history of the

past has too often proved this to be the case.

‘That is the old castle of Boulogne, Miss Cheyne,’ said Tom Llanyard, drawing near her, and finding it impossible not to say something; ‘and now we can make out the arched gateways in the ramparts.’

‘I have been there,’ replied Alison, ‘and know the place well—the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice, and all the pretty promenades.’

Indeed, she knew the place rather too well, as her father had been compelled to retire there, more than once, from motives of prudence and economy.

‘Where are we sailing to?’ she asked, after a pause.

‘I scarcely know, Miss Cheyne; Lord Cadbury’s orders are that we are to hug the coast of France and keep under easy sail. I thought, perhaps, you might know,’ he added.

‘No, I know nothing,’ she answered, wearily.

‘Surely it can’t be that this mere girl is about to chuck herself away on a brute like Cadbury!’ thought Tom, as he looked with sympathy on her blanched face and quivering lip.

‘Thank you—you are very kind to me,’ said Alison, as he readjusted the rugs and wraps about her.

‘Kind to you!’ ejaculated Tom—‘who on earth or sea either would not be kind to you!’

Alison smiled at his blunt energy, and she rather clung to the society of this good, cheery, honest fellow, and felt, when with or near him, a sense of protection.

‘It is evident that Cadbury is up to some game,’ thought Tom; ‘but it is the way of the world—the world in which these people live. Her youth and beauty, poor girl, will be his; his rank and money, the old bloater, will be hers—so the odds are evens, and they are quits.’

In the vexation this reflection gave him

Tom took off his naval cap and passed a hand over his forehead. As he did so, Alison for the first time remarked that a deep red scar traversed it from the right temple to the left eyebrow.

‘You must at some time have met with a terrible accident, Captain Llanyard,’ said she, sympathetically; ‘what a pity that wound is in your forehead!’

‘I thank you, Miss Cheyne, for the interest it gives me in your eyes. I was in the Queen’s service when I got that wound, and nearly lost the number of my mess thereby. Shall I tell you about it?’

‘If you please.’

‘Eight years ago I was serving with the China squadron, and, having been left sick at Canton, took a passage in the steamer *Kent* to join my ship, which was lying off Macao. She had a great many male passengers on board—all narrow-eyed, greedy, and ferocious-looking Chinese. They were about thirty in number, and we had barely

cleared the Tigris and made a good offing when I discovered, by my knowledge of the lingo, that every one of them was a pirate, and that the whole gang had taken their passage together with the intention of seizing the ship and cargo, after killing every other soul on board.

‘Strange to say, as if they had some mysterious prevision of what was about to ensue, a shoal of sharks followed us from the mouth of the Tigris.

‘I had barely informed the captain of what I had discovered when we heard a row forward in the fore-castle, where they got up a sham disturbance, and all suddenly appeared with arms—swords, pistols, and knives, which they had secreted under their clothes. The mate went forward to quell the noise, but was instantly cut down.

‘No one on board had any weapons but myself and the captain. We had both revolvers, and I had my sword; but what could we do among so many? The crew

betook themselves to handspikes and boat-hooks, and a close conflict ensued, in which the captain and many shared the fate of the mate; the scene became horrible, and the deck was covered with blood.

‘Fighting only to protract life, and not with the hope of escaping death, I made a terrible resistance. The six chambers of my revolver disposed of six of the gang; with my sword I cut down two more, when it broke off at the hilt. I was helpless then, got this cut across my head, and was forced to leap overboard, where, all but blinded by my own blood, I clung to the fore chains, oblivious of the sharks that were gliding stealthily about, while the yells, shouts, and explosion of fire-arms continued on deck, until all the crew were disposed of, save a few who contrived to secrete themselves below.

‘Then the ship was ransacked from stem to stern; twelve thousand dollars in notes of the Hong Kong banks were taken from

repositories of the purser ; a hundred cases of rich silk and all the most valuable things that could be found were brought on deck ; the boats were hoisted out, and in them, laden with plunder, the pirates departed for the shore, leaving the *Kent* floating like a log on the water, with the blood trickling from her scuppers into the moonlighted sea.

‘ I managed to scramble on board, and never shall I forget the sight her decks presented, for the bodies of the dead were hacked and mutilated beyond all recognition. I bound up my wound, when almost fainting with exhaustion and loss of blood. A gunboat bound for Macao overhauled us next day, and with her I rejoined my ship ; but the damage done to my figure-head will never pass away, and times there are when it causes me to feel giddy and strange even still.’

Finding that he had procured a listener, though a rather appalled one, Tom told her many other anecdotes of the sea ; but

they were all of a gloomy and depressing kind, and had reference to wrecks and rafts of starving castaways, of pest-stricken ships found with all their crews dead but one man, of cannibals and sharks, and much more to the same purpose, for no other element is so full of mystery to the imaginative mind as the world of waters; and so thought Alison, as the *Firefly* floated in her aimless voyage upon it, and she surveyed around her the vastness of the sea, with that strange fascination it possesses—‘glorious with light or dreadful with darkness, instinct with silent shadow always gliding over its everlasting motion, it appeals to the senses as a kind of materialised eternity, a wondrous world, barren and lonely, whereon not the giddiest flow of wind that ever crisped its ripples can match the capriciousness of its fathomless and mighty heart.’

Of that capriciousness, and the perils incident to those who traverse its trackless bosom, poor Alison was fated to

have a terrible experience ere the dawn of the next day shone upon its rolling waves.

CHAPTER II.

A DISASTROUS NIGHT.

ALL day the *Firefly* had run pretty swiftly along the coast of France, and that of Belgium, low, flat, and sandy, was on her lee, when a pitchy darkness fell upon the sea. The sky overhead was black and starless, and most cheerless indeed seemed the gloom amid which the yacht was sailing.

Muffled in her warmest wraps, Alison was lingering on deck, alone, though the night was rather advanced, and she leant on, or rather clung to, Tom Llanyard's arm as she promenaded the now damp and somewhat slippery deck, walking restlessly to and fro, like a caged animal, sometimes muttering to herself—

‘Oh, if I could but tire myself out—utterly out—that I might get some deep and dreamless sleep at night !’

The deck at that time was far from comfortable, but she preferred it to the cabin, with the society of Cadbury, who believed in what Hawley Smart calls, ‘tobacco and *moistened* conversation,’ and was having a cigarette and brandy and water with Sir Ranald.

To the eastward some faint lights twinkled for a time far off and dim in the distance, with black wave-tops rising opaquely between, indicating the whereabouts of some Flemish village; but even these melted out, and the darkness seemed to become deeper still.

To Alison’s eye it was a positive relief to watch from time to time the light of the binnacle-lamp as it streamed on the weather-beaten visage of the man at the wheel, his figure swaying steadily with the motion of the yacht, and his feet planted firmly on

a wooden grating; to watch the other light in the skylight of the warm and cosy cabin, and the occasional showers of red sparks that came from the funnel of its fire-place, and melted out, amid the gloom, to leeward.

‘And England lies there?’ said Alison, turning her face westward.

‘Yes, Miss Cheyne,’ replied Tom, who was greatly enchanted to have the girl all to himself, and to feel her little hand clinging to his arm. ‘I should think that Harwich is well-nigh abeam of us now.’

‘And how far off may it be?’

‘Some sixty miles or so—too far,’ he added, laughing, ‘for us to hear the clang of the Bell Buoy.’

‘Too far, indeed!’

‘Are you anxious to return homeward?’

‘Oh, yes, I hope, I do hope we shall do so soon,’ exclaimed Alison, with a little sob in her throat.

Tom Llanyard heard the sound, and, kindly patting the hand that lay on his arm,

he said, laughingly, 'There is nothing in this world like hope, to a sailor especially. What does the old song say?'

And Tom sung in a low, and not unmusical voice,

'Poor Jack saw his bark on the ocean of life
Now sink, now the billows o'ertop,
When despair would present him a bullet or knife,
He lays hold on the anchor of Hope.

'His chest and his trifles may sink in the wave,
Fore and aft a loved messmate may drop,
He may shed a salt tear for the loss of the brave,
But he leans on the anchor of Hope.

"Heart of oak," sobs he, bluntly, "your fate I deplore,
Ne'er a smarter could splice me a rope,
Still, my lad, we must keep a good look-out afore,
And depend on the anchor of Hope."

Ere Alison could say a word of compliment to Tom on his singing, one of the watch forward cried out,

'Light ahead!'

'Where away?' asked Tom.

'Right ahead, sir.'

'I can't see it.'

‘Can’t help that, sir—it was there a moment ago, a point or so on the lee bow.’

Another man of the watch asserted the same thing. Tom Llanyard got his night-glass, and swept the obscurity ahead with it, but in vain.

Intensely dark was the night—intensely black the sea through which the yacht was running. The gurgle and wash of the billows could be heard at the bows and under the counter, but nothing was seen of them. There was no phosphorescent gleam—no pale streak of foam to catch the eye or define the presence of the deep, and the imaginative mind of Alison felt in its fullest sense all the mystery of the hidden miles of water that were around her; while the keen and ceaseless watch kept by those on deck impressed her with a curiously mingled sense of security and danger—security in the skill and courage of the crew; danger in the knowledge that there were shoals and sands about her, and a sea alive with vessels.

Suddenly out of the darkness there came two wavering flames, then a row of red round lights, all in a line, as a steamer swept past, looming huge and dark, with a cloud of red sparks streaming to leeward from her unseen funnel, and the commotion her screw propeller and the pulsing her engines made in the water passed away with her, and there seemed to be a deeper darkness all around the *Firefly* as she faded into the obscurity astern.

‘That was the light you saw?’ said Tom to the look-out man forward.

‘It was *not*, sir,’ replied the sailor, confidently, ‘for there it is again!’

At some undefinable distance a light, like that of a lantern, flickering, feeble, and lambent, seemed to dance for a moment on the waves, and then disappeared.

Suddenly a shout went from stem to stern.

‘Something right ahead—something large and black, Captain Llanyard!’ cried the look-out man.

‘Hard a-port—the helm—hard a-port,’ thundered Llanyard, ‘or we’ll be slap into her!’

Lord Cadbury and Sir Ranald now came rushing on deck, and quitting the arm of Tom, who had now other work to do, Alison clung fearfully to her father, whose arm went instinctively round her.

‘Lights—lights alongside—where is she?—what is it, in the name of God?’ cried twenty voices, as a dreadful crash, followed by the sound of splintering wood, was heard.

‘All hands shorten sail!’ cried Tom Llanyard; ‘man the fore clew garnets—stand by the top-gallant clew-lines—stand by the peak and throat halyards—down with the jib—lift tacks and sheets—let go and belay—look to the main gaff, and get out lights for God’s sake!’

Tom’s rapid orders were skilfully and speedily obeyed, and in a very few minutes the sails were reduced and nearly furled,

while the cold night wind swept through the open rigging, and the *Firefly* rose and fell on the long rollers, with a terrible jarring and rasping sound, as she was evidently foul of some vessel, but had not suffered apparently, according to the carpenter's first report on the state of the pumps.

She lay-to with only canvas enough on her for steering purposes.

A great flame now glared upward right under her bows, as the wavering and streaming blaze from a flare-tin showed that she was foul of a great Belgian fishing smack, of a tonnage equal to her own—her deck to all appearance full of men, shrieking and gesticulating as only Frenchmen or Belgians gesticulate and shriek, inspired by terror, their pallid and excited faces, half seen in light, half hidden in shadow, against the surrounding blackness, as the red glare from the upheld flare-tin fell on them, and on the head or berthing boards of the lugger, which bore her name—*Le Chien Noir d'Os-*

tende—The Black Hound of Ostend! The Black Hound! Was there a fatality in this?

Alison was sick with affright; her father looked grimly, sternly, and pitifully on; but my Lord Cadbury's teeth (or what remained of them) were clattering in his jaws like castanets.

'This is no fault of ours, my lord,' said Tom, 'we had our top-light, as you see; these lubbers had none.'

As he spoke the red light from the flare-tin shed one more than usually powerful glare of radiance on the crowd of appalled visages that lined the hull and filled the rigging of the broken and battered lugger; and then expired, leaving all in the blackness of night again.

Every lantern in the *Firefly* was now brought on deck and bent on to ropes, the boats were cleared away for hoisting out, fenders were hung over the side, and life-buoys and belts cut away. Again came the crashing, rasping sound, as the hull of the

lugger, which was evidently stove in, swerved alongside the yacht, across the deck of which her mainmast fell with a crash, bringing down the fore-topmast of the former with all its top hamper, making her for the time also a helpless wreck.

A block swinging at the end of a rope struck Sir Ranald Cheyne and hurled him on the deck. Alison bent over him in despair and terror indescribable and unutterable, feeling scarcely able to restrain the conviction that all this was really happening to herself.

‘We are bulged forward, and water is rising fast below now, my lord,’ reported the carpenter, rushing up to Cadbury, who seemed paralysed with terror.

‘Stand by the fall-tackles, and lower away the boats,’ ordered Tom Llanyard, whose voice could scarcely be heard amid the hubbub on board the lugger, which was still alongside.

Fully five minutes elapsed before this

was done; one fall-tackle got jammed in the davit-block, another boat was without its plug, and, barely had the two boats of the *Firefly* touched the water, when, knife in hand, the terrified crew of the lugger began to crowd into them.

By this time poor Alison had fainted, with little Daisy Prune crawling close to her side, and was in blessed unconsciousness of the awful scene around her presented by so many men struggling for life, and drowning, as both vessels began apparently to settle gradually down into the black and silent midnight sea.

CHAPTER III.

THE BALL.

MUCH about the time of the disaster we have recorded, some other of our *dramatis personæ* were actors amid a very different scene.

A star-lighted but moonless sky overhung the stately modern mansion of Wilmothurst, and gloomy indeed would the long, wintry avenue have looked, but for the many-coloured lamps that shed a soft radiance from branch to branch, and from one gnarled stem to another, lighting the gravelled way for the fast-rolling carriages that came in quick succession to the Tuscan *porte-cochère*, setting down the shawled and daintily-shod guests, where a scarlet carpet-

ing extended from the doorway to the terrace.

The great house was all ablaze with lights that glowed from every lofty window, and made the owls wink and blink in the tower of the village church ; while a huge fire in the arched fireplace of the entrance-hall sent forth a ruddy glow every time the tall double doors were unfolded to admit a guest.

Bella Chevenix came fully arrayed for conquest. Her dress of sheeny white silk was cut so as to display fully her beautiful throat and shoulders, with short sleeves that left her snowy arms bare. She wore very little jewellery ; but among the folds of her skirt were trails of natural flowers, with their fresh green leaves. There was a rich flush on her cheeks, a radiance in her soft hazel eyes, and undoubtedly the girl looked surpassingly bright and beautiful ; and among the guests she was glad to see Bevil Goring, Dalton—looking *distrain*, as he al-

ways did now—and other Aldershot men whom she knew, and had met at balls, meets, and garden-parties.

As one handsome girl after another came in, all more or less beautifully attired, bright with smiles and glittering with jewels, Goring looked on the groups that gathered wistfully as one in a dream, thinking where at that precise time was *she* who might have outshone them all—in his eyes at least.

The great dancing-room was some ninety feet long, and its walls were hung with many old family portraits, between which were vacant spaces once occupied by the Rubens, Titians, Vandycks, and other really valuable pictures, all of which had been sold in the lifetime of Jerry's father—perhaps before the fatal mortgages had been contracted.

In a corridor beyond was the band of the Wilmothurst Rifle Volunteers to furnish music for the dancers, who speedily began to arrange themselves, while the programme cards were fast filling up.

Under the watchful eyes of his mother and his cousin Emily, Jerry inscribed his name more than once upon that of Bella Chevenix, but took care that it should be for dances further on in the night.

Jerry opened the ball with the Countess of Ashcombe, the 'head lady' of the evening, after which he went near her no more, or—as his mother phrased it—'neglected her shamefully for that Chevenix girl,' whose father stood apart in a corner watching with fondness and admiration the beauty of Bella, the grace with which she floated through a succession of waltzes, and seemed to be enjoying herself to the full, especially when she had her first dance with Jerry, who eventually brought her panting and breathless to the side of her father, just as the latter was addressing Lady Wilmot, who chanced to be near him.

'The young fellows of *our* time, my lady,' said he, in a fidgety way, feeling the necessity for saying something, 'were better at

this sort of work than those of the present ; they don't seem equal to dancing, somehow.'

'I do not understand you, Mr. Chevenix,' said Lady Wilmot, with one of her calm stares.

'I mean that we fogies saw something *like* dancing at country balls in *our* time ; what " Sir Rogers " we danced, cross hands and down the middle, and all that sort of thing, before, as now, we became anxious about draughts and damp linen, and all that sort of thing, my lady.'

Lady Wilmot smiled disdainfully, and found herself looking as if she failed to comprehend him.

'Yes,' said Jerry, uncomfortably, ' Hampshire people did cling to these fashions, Mr. Chevenix, and, when they danced, meant it in no mistake.'

Though, in his pre-occupation of mind, Bevil Goring was far from enjoying himself, he was too good a dancer not to have plenty of partners, but there was more than

one pair of lovers there that night who sought the corridors, the staircase, or the aisles of the great conservatory, and he regarded them enviously, as he thought of her from whom he was as yet so hopelessly, and, as it seemed, cruelly and absurdly separated.

But, as for the ball, it is chiefly as regards Jerry's affair that we refer to it. As a ball it was undoubtedly a success. There was a sprinkling of titled people, a number of the squirearchy, a large proportion of gentleman farmers, and blooming dowagers blessed with broods of pert, pretty, marriageable daughters, and Jerry had brought a considerable male contingent from the camp, so 'all went merry as a marriage bell.'

As for Bella, she was never without partners, as those who danced with her once always came *back again*.

'Jerry has actually introduced Lord Twe-sildown to that girl!' said Lady Wilmot behind her fan to Cousin Emily, who grew

pale with annoyance. We may mention that the peer in question took his title from the highest mountain which overlooks Aldershot. But after a turn or two they observed that the pair took a promenade round the room.

‘Is this your first visit to the district?’ asked Lord Twesildown.

‘Oh, no,’ replied Bella, ‘I live here.’

‘Live here, at Wilmothurst!’

‘Yes—at the village.’

‘How funny!’ drawled his lordship, rather puzzled. ‘Oh, Chevenix—I remember the name now.’

‘Lead me to a seat, please,’ said Bella, curtly, on which he conducted her to one near Lady Wilmot, and retired into a corner.

‘Tired already, Miss Chevenix?’ asked Lady Wilmot.

‘Oh, no—I never tire of the waltz when I have a good partner,’ replied Bella.

‘And Lord Twesildown?’

‘Oh, he can’t dance a bit.’

‘Heavens!—surely you did not tell him so?’

‘Well, I hinted as much.’

‘Oh, Miss Chevenix, what will he think?’

‘He said he thought he would adapt his step to mine, but he had no step to adapt.’

‘But to say this to a man of his position!’

The haughty Bella, who resented Lady Wilmot’s tone and expression of eye, only fanned herself and laughed, as if she thought an earl’s son might be ‘snubbed’ as well as that of a yeoman.

Her hostess now turned her back on Bella, and never addressed her again.

As Jerry was again drawing near, Lady Wilmot approached him, and said,

‘Do you mean to dance with no one but Miss Chevenix to-night?’

‘Mother, I have only danced with her twice as yet, and I have done my duty to everyone else, so I think I may please myself now. Our waltz, I think, Miss Chevenix,’ he added, as his arm went round her,

and they disappeared among the whirling circles that swept over the polished floor to the music of the military band.

Bella had been—nay, was still—a good deal of a flirt, perhaps in a very innocent way, but a something now in the expression of Jerry's eyes, in the tone of his voice, nay, in the very touch of his hand, startled her hitherto careless heart from its girlish unconsciousness and gave it a thrill, 'too sweet for fever, too timid for joy,' or developed still further the new sensations to which it had been awakening.

And Jerry, with his arm caressingly around her and her breath on his cheek, smiled at himself as he thought of his past jealousy of Dalton and Mrs. Trelawney—Dalton, the good-natured cynic!

He had still too much command over himself, and, though young, was too much a man of the world to let those around him read his thoughts with reference to Bella; but his watchful mother could detect that it

was into Bella's eyes he looked with passion when near her, that it was Bella he took in to supper, and with whom he sat in the conservatory after, where the flashing fountain played amid the softly veiled light, and half concealed his utterances by the sound of its waters.

And Jerry was proudly conscious that Bella's beauty had excited much comment—envy among the women, and admiration among the men.

'Miss Chevenix—introduce me to her,' had been dinned into his ear half the night; 'is she rich, an heiress, or what; is there anything singular about her besides her beauty, Jerry?'

Amid all the gaiety around him Jerry's heart was a heavy one. He now felt that he loved Bella passionately; but the memory of those mortgages, and the view that they would inevitably cause Mr. Chevenix, Bella herself, and all who knew of their peculiarity and existence to take of

his love and his attentions, fettered his tongue, and caused him, even when he had the lovely girl all to himself in the solitude of the conservatory, to speak dubiously and enigmatically; thus leading her, in her pride and hauteur, to fear that he was viewing her through the medium of his mother and with her aristocratic eyes; and thus, with all the love of him in her heart, Bella felt that heart revolt at the situation and swell a little with anger.

He shrank from uttering the words that loaded his tongue—the longed for declaration his attentions had given Bella an undoubted right to expect—and she resented because she misunderstood the reason of his not doing so. She dreaded that he had taught her to love him, while looking down upon her position in the world—at least, the world in which he and his mother moved.

‘Do you know that all our fellows from the camp, and indeed all my mother’s

guests, are quite wild in their admiration of you!' he said, in a low voice.

'How kind—how excessively condescending of them?' exclaimed Bella, sharply, opening and shutting her fan again and again.

He regarded her with a little perplexity, and felt his cheek colour.

'And Lady Wilmot—does *she* share in that gust of admiration?' she asked, with an unmistakable curl on her lovely lip.

'Bella—oh, permit me to call you so, as of old? What has come to you—what has offended you?'

'Nothing has come to me—nothing has offended me; but I should not have come here to-night, and you have no right to call me Bella now!'

'I beg your pardon—the name came naturally to my lips—we were such good friends of old.'

'Your mother does not view us as such. *Her* friendship consists of loftily patronising

me, while looking down upon me and my father too. You know this as well as I do, Captain Wilmot.'

Jerry was silent, and thought.

'I came here to talk, perhaps of love, and now, by Jove, it seems we are quarrelling!'

His face expressed this and the pain her words gave him; and Bella, ever a creature of impulse, felt that she was froward, petulant, and foolishly irritable; but his mother's haughty manner had stung her keenly more than once that night.

Jerry sighed and rose from his seat.

'Pardon me,' said she, in her sweet, low voice, and with an upward glance of her light brown eyes that was irresistible; 'I know that I am very cross with you, and—and I don't know why.'

'Miss Chevenix——'

'Call me Bella!' said she, impetuously, as she bit the feathers of her fan.

'Oh, Bella, you know not how I am situ-

ated with regard to you!' he began, as he thought of the mortgages.

'Oh, I understand it precisely,' said she, flushing deeply. 'You are very fond of me, perhaps—admire me very much, of course; but it is an affair of proud relations—high position in the county on the one hand, and the granddaughter of the farmer of Langley Park on the other—that is it? So let us drop our acting; you your mock love-making——'

'Mock love-making!' he exclaimed, sorrowfully and reproachfully.

'Yes; and I shall drop my flirty way. And now let us go back to the dancers; I want papa, and wish to go home.'

'Oh, Bella, you know not—may never, never know—what my mind is struggling with!' he began, in a low and hurried voice, and then paused; for it was strange that jolly Jerry, usually cool, calm, self-reliant in the tumult of the betting-ring, in the business transactions of life, in the hurly-

burly of a field-day in the Long Valley, with a dozen of aides-de-camp all bellowing contrary orders to him at once, should be wanting in confidence when alone with Bella Chevenix ; and yet perhaps it was not strange, when those infernal mortgages, which made her an heiress and him a half ruined man, are remembered.

Young Twesildown's profound admiration for Bella—notwithstanding her snub—admiration openly expressed to himself, and that of more than one other man, had made Jerry feel uncomfortable and savage—all the more that he had begun to assume or feel a right of proprietary in her that in itself was very delightful ; but it is said that 'a man head over ears in love would feel jealous of his charmer's uncle, not knowing him to be such ;' and certainly Jerry Wilmot was in that submerged condition.

'With what is your mind struggling?' asked Bella, with reference to his broken words.

‘I know not how to explain.’

‘You do look troubled, Captain Wilmot. In your usually merry face one never sees such an expression as it wears now,’ said she, surveying his features with her sweet and earnest eyes, full of great and sudden sympathy. ‘What—amid a scene like this to-night—this gay world of yours, rank and luxury around you—what mental pain have you to struggle with?’

Jerry felt her slender fingers trembling in his hand, and he pressed them softly and caressingly.

‘You know not all I have endured of doubt and love too, Bella, since—since—’

‘Since when?’ she asked, impatiently, but in a low voice.

‘That interview I had with your father.’

Her dilated eyes expressed great wonder at this unexpected reply.

‘What passed between you?’ she asked.

‘I cannot tell you—now at least—and so infuse an aspect of selfishness, with bitter-

ness too, in the sweetness of a moment like this.'

'Jerry!' exclaimed the girl, bewildered by his manner.

His name escaped her lips almost unconsciously, but the sound of it then again, as in his boyish days, made every pulse quicken and his heart to thrill.

'Bella, my darling! I love you. You know that I have always loved you, and never anyone else.' (Though this was not precisely the case, just then Jerry thought it was.) 'I have struggled against that love till I can do so no longer'—(Why? thought Bella, with anger growing in her breast)—'struggled against it, but it has overpowered me at last; and though the world I live in might view the avowal with contempt and derision, and utterly mistake the spirit in which I make it, I do love you dearly, Bella,' he added in a low, beseeching voice.

All unknown to himself, this speech in its phraseology was about the most blundering

he could have addressed to the haughty Bella Chevenix!

Her beautiful eyes were sparkling with indignation now; her face was blanched and very pale, for she loved Jerry dearly, though at that moment only anger and bitterness were swelling in her breast. She snatched her hand from his clasp, and, cresting up her head, said proudly,

‘This world of yours shall never know from me at least that you have condescended to address me thus. You deem it condescension; I an insult!’

‘An insult, Bella?’

‘Enough of this: let us rejoin the dancers.’

Jerry was utterly bewildered, and led her from the conservatory, on emerging from which the first eyes that met them were those of Lady Wilmot, and they wore an expression at once cold, inquiring, and reprehensive, which added to the annoyance of Bella, who hurriedly, and without a word

of adieu to Jerry, took the arm of her father.

The latter had been enjoying himself after his own fashion during a protracted visit to the supper-room, and was by no means yet prepared to withdraw.

She danced with Goring, with Dalton, and in quick succession with all the men who again and again pressed round her, and whose names were on her card, including even the slighted Lord Twesildown, to whom several bumpers of champagne had given fresh courage, while the crushed and bewildered Jerry watched her from the doorway; and none who saw her there in all the radiance of her rare beauty, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushing, her whole face wreathed with smiles, would have imagined the turmoil of angry thoughts surging in her snow-white bosom.

On one hand Lady Wilmot was intensely irritated to see Jerry looking so *distrain*—‘put out’—after his too evident confabula-

tion in the conservatory with Miss Chevenix, and on the other she was exasperated to see the fast and furious love and flirtation between that young lady and the vapid Lord Twesildown, as she had views of her own regarding him and Cousin Emily, so Lady Wilmot was sorely worried by the general results of Jerry's birthday ball.

At last the guests began to depart, and Bella's father led her away; Twesildown shawled her in the hall, and handed her into their snug family brougham, and she was driven home through the familiar country lanes and roads like one in a dream.

That Jerry Wilmot, whom, in her secret heart she actually loved so dearly, should have insulted her in that supreme moment of declaring his passion by inference, as she thought, by broadly hinting of her humbler origin and the disparity of their position in society—a disparity his proud mother had often made her feel keenly—stung the impulsive and naturally warm-hearted girl.

She threw off her ball-dress in hot and angry haste, tossed her few ornaments from her, and, casting herself upon her bed, wept bitterly in her sense of disappointment and humiliation, while the dim, grey hours of the winter morning stole slowly over the landscape and the silent village of Wilmot-hurst.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VISIT.

BELLA CHEVENIX took an early opportunity of questioning her father, though apparently in a casual way, as to the nature of the interview that had taken place between him and Jerry Wilmot—the interview to which the latter had referred so mysteriously and in broken accents.

Mr. Chevenix told her all about it, adding, when he saw how she changed colour, and seemed deeply moved by his information :

‘Why do you ask, Bella?’

‘Because—I never have secrets from you, papa—he referred to his interview in a very remarkable manner in the conservatory.’

‘Did he propose to you?’

‘No, papa,’ said Bella, colouring painfully now; ‘but he nearly—very nearly did so.’

‘A nice move towards paying off the mortgages truly!’ said Mr. Chevenix, with a rather contemptuous laugh.

‘He *condescended* to express his love for me,’ thought Bella, ‘and a proposal would, of course, have followed; he would seek to marry me that thereby the encumbrances might be cleared from his estate!’

Her thoughts were very bitter indeed, for now most anxious doubts of the purity and honesty of Jerry’s intentions were implanted in her mind; and yet she loved Jerry on one hand quite as much as she—honest girl—derided and despised the inborn and constitutional selfishness of his haughty mother, and all such ‘aristocratic snobs,’ as she called them in the angry bitterness of her heart. But she resolved to show Jerry her indifference, and treat him as she thought he deserved to be.

‘His selfishness apart, it is the old story,’

she muttered, 'the old story of the earthen pot that sought to swim with those of brass. In his mind, I suppose, I am the earthen-ware.'

At other times, when her real regard for Jerry prevailed, she would think—

'Oh, that papa would throw these horrid mortgages in the fire, that I might be poor, and so test the truth of Jerry's love for me. How strange that *my* money and *his* lands should keep us apart; but for this involvement, would he ever have loved me for myself alone?'

If Jerry actually meant all he said, he was certainly not influenced by his mother, whose frigid hauteur to Bella was never concealed; and, if he did mean it, she, Bella Chevenix, might be mistress of Wilmothurst, and send Lady Wilmot to vegetate at the dower house of Langley Park; but to accept him would be at the price of lowering herself to the level on which he received her.

'No, no,' thought Bella, bitterly, as she

recalled what she deemed Jerry's most galling speech; 'the derision and contempt of the world you live in shall never be excited by hearing my name coupled with yours, Captain Wilmot.'

Hitherto Jerry had paid her great, very great and marked attention, but until the night of the ball, and with it that ill-omened *tête-à-tête* in the conservatory, he had gone no farther.

Should she pay a ceremonious call with her father now, or simply send her card to Lady Wilmot?

Bella was sorely perplexed—pride struggled with love—so she went for an afternoon call after the recent festivity, but resolved to be guarded; and, while giving Jerry no opportunity of recurring to the past, show him how utterly she was indifferent to him.

On riding over to Wilmothurst, she and her father were received by Lady Wilmot and 'Cousin Emily' in the drawing-room,

from whence Jerry—greatly to her relief—drew her father and Bevil Goring away to his own particular sanctum, and she was left with the two ladies, whose conversation after the prospects of the weather and events of the ball were discussed, speedily took a turn that poor Bella knew was meant for her edification.

‘You made quite a conquest of Lord Twesildown, Miss Chevenix,’ said Lady Wilmot, with one of her company smiles.

‘And of Jerry too,’ added Miss Wilmot.

‘We are old friends,’ said Bella, faintly smiling.

‘But Jerry is such a flirt!’ exclaimed Lady Wilmot, remembering the visit to the conservatory. ‘He has been a worry to me ever since he left Eton, and then I was only too glad to get him off to his regiment.’

‘Why?’

‘The silly boy fell quite in love with a little waiting-maid I had. He regards all women as puppets, and is never in earnest

about any of them ; seven years of him, I fear, wouldn't prove that Jerry had a heart.'

'Jerry always burns much incense at some shrine or other,' added Cousin Emily (at whose shrine he had never burned any) ; 'his goddess generally changes with the season or the locality ; and we all know how in country quarters the most silly things are developed.'

'To make love to the lips that are near has always been poor silly Jerry's way. He is such an incorrigible flirt !'

Bella knew quite enough of the world to know what prompted these remarks, and many more that followed, together with the memory of a subtle, soft, and sympathetic manner towards herself that galled her by its implication.

With all her apparent sweetness of manner, Cousin Emily was a good hater ; so she hated Bella Chevenix, and felt that if she could traverse Jerry's too probable love

affair with, or penchant for, that young lady she would do so ; she was too well-bred, or too careful, to show her hand, and yet she showed a dexterity almost devilish in implanting in Bella's mind serious thoughts of poor Jerry, and of adding to, or confirming, those which existed there already.

There was a slight, yet decided contraction of Bella's forehead as she listened to these speeches ; a slight twitching, too, of the lovely lips ; but a proud disdain of the speakers was chiefly what she felt.

Lady Wilmot could detect that much of Bella's natural *verve* and vivacity were gone ; yet she was compelled, mentally, to admit that Bella was a splendid-looking girl—bright, beautiful, and graceful to a degree—as she sat there in her well-fitted riding habit, than which few costumes are more becoming to a pretty woman.

During a country-house visit of nearly half an hour she thought she had heard enough, and more than enough, of Jerry's

fickleness and flirtations, and rose to withdraw ; but a storm of snow rendered departure impossible just then ; her own and her father's horse had been taken round to the stable-yard ; she had now the dread of being perhaps some hours in the society of Jerry, and deeply deplored her weakness in coming, feeling that she would require some art to show the indifference she had resolved to exhibit ; thus, when the gentlemen joined them again, she spoke almost exclusively to Bevil Goring and Lord Twesildown, or remained silent, for she was intensely anxious to be gone.

If the usually gay Bella said little generally in Lady Wilmot's presence, she observed keenly, and her somewhat shy and haughty manner to her hostess was to a certain extent assumed, as the result of her secret resentment of the mode in which that dame was disposed to view and treat her.

'Cousin Emily' had been more than once painfully conscious that when 'the

agent's daughter' was present she was relegated completely to the background, and that even Jerry cared not to flirt or make fun with her, so much was he absorbed in Bella Chevenix; and, though in some respects rather a nice girl, she began to conceive, as we have said, an animosity against her, and to consider how she could bring about a rupture between them before Jerry's leave of absence expired. 'We do not,' says a writer, 'resort to such clumsy expedients as daggers and poisoned bowls in the nineteenth century; but vindictive people deal out as cruel reprisals, even now-a-days, in good society, though it is etiquette to receive the fatal thrust with an easy smile, and wrestle with your anguish in the silence of your chamber.'

But to Emily's great surprise she found that Jerry and Miss Chevenix scarcely addressed each other; that there was a complete change in their bearing; that the latter chatted gaily with Goring and others,

and seemed at times utterly oblivious of Jerry's presence.

She was much exercised in her mind by this discovery. What did it import?

Jerry seemed reserved and *distrain*, while at times Miss Chevenix seemed gayer than ever, and when she was in the billiard-room with him, Goring, and Twesildown, and ever so many more men, she actually acted somewhat like a romp, while showing how many times she could hit running off the red ball—'a nice accomplishment for a young lady!' as Lady Wilmot remarked when she was told of it after.

But all the gentlemen were enchanted with Bella, and were full of admiration at the grace and contour of her figure as she handled her cue with hands of matchless form and whiteness; and when she did take her departure it was Twesildown that assisted her to mount, and adjusted her skirt and reins, but Jerry remained behind in the *porte-cochère*, and simply lifted his hat, while

a heavy load lay on his heart. Her reception of his love-making on the one hand, her wounded pride on the other, and the knowledge that she was under the keen and cynical eyes of Lady Wilmot and his cousin, had combined to make the protracted visit a most painful one to both. So two of the actors in our little drama separated, sore with each other and bitter in heart—no longer *en rapport*.

‘I am glad that girl is gone at last,’ remarked his mother. ‘She is not fit for polished society, or to associate with Emily.’

‘I have heard,’ said that young lady, ‘that when at Brighton she tried to become a professional beauty, by having her photo in every shop-window.’

‘How wonderfully well you well-bred women can make those you hate or envy feel that you look down upon them,’ said Jerry, angrily.

‘I have no doubt she feels amply compensated for all that by the flattery and atten-

tion of the gentlemen ; she is quite a kind of garrison beauty,' retorted Emily.

'Why are all your remarks on that girl so dashed with vinegar—decided Chili?' asked Jerry.

'She gives herself airs far above her station in life.'

'Tush ; we are all descended from Adam and Eve—a gardener and his wife.'

'You will never convince me that there is not good and bad blood in this world,' exclaimed Lady Wilmot.

'Bravo, mater—cast the scheme of creation anew ! What are the odds so long as we are happy. But I think the time has now come when you should know the influence this young lady's father may have in our affairs.'

Jerry now put before his horrified mother—horrified to hear of their necessity—the matter of the mortgages, and the full extent of these, and urged that she should show Bella some more marked attention,

and less hauteur or supercilious indifference, and have her more often at the mansion house, to the guests at which she—a handsome girl, full of natural gaiety, and with a decided turn for charades, *tableaux-vivants*, private theatricals, lawn tennis, and games of all kinds—would prove invaluable.

But Lady Wilmot heard him in silence, with a knit of her pencilled eyebrows and a droop in the corners of her handsome mouth. She could only think of these horrible mortgages, and the awful humiliation of half the estate being in the hands of Mr. Chevenix.

‘The estate seems to be quite slipping from me,’ said Jerry, after a gloomy pause.

‘Slipping?’

‘Yes, it is guineas to gooseberries that the rest will follow Langley Park and so forth.’

‘Terrible to think—not to be thought of at all! Why, the estate has been the home of the Wilmots for four hundred years!’

‘We can never recover what has been lost.’

‘Unless you make a wealthy marriage, Jerry dear—such as you have every right to look forward to.’

Jerry shrugged his shoulders, and pulled dreamily at his cigar after flicking the white ash off it.

‘Let the mortgaged land go!’ he exclaimed. ‘I do not mean to dedicate my life by clearing that for others, which others did not clear for me.’

‘Jerry!’

‘Remember, mater dear, I have had only a little, and not all, to do in bringing matters to this pass with Wilmothurst, and I decline to act the part of a family martyr.’

‘What will society say?’

‘Society be hanged! I have read in a book, and I know it to be truth, that “Society at its best will entertain you if you amuse it, and will drop you, as a rule, upon the first suspicion of your wanting a twenty-pound note. Society saps your energy,

snaps your finances, and half-a-dozen good attorneys are fifty times more valuable acquaintances than half the peerage would be at present.”’

‘Where on earth do you pick up such detestable opinions, Jerry Wilmot?’ exclaimed his mother, holding up her white hands in dismay, while she began seriously to consider where a suitable bride with a long purse could be found and urged upon his attention.

He meanwhile was chiefly engaged in remembering how, at the ball, Miss Chevenix had—after that rather sensational interview in the conservatory—gone off at once into an incipient flirtation with ‘that utter oaf,’ young Twesildown; but where is the woman who, believing herself to be treated as Bella thought she had been, would have thrown away a chance of retaliation and revenge, when a handsome young man of rank seemed disposed to devote himself to her?

CHAPTER V.

DOUBTING.

PRIOR to that affair in the conservatory, Bella had been to him all that a man had a right to expect—that is, a man who had not definitely declared himself; now that he had done so, she had thrown him completely over.

‘What strong running I might make with her beyond a doubt, but for those accursed mortgages!’ said Jerry to Bevil Goring, as they lounged in the smoking-room. ‘She thinks I do not want her for herself, but to rid me of these, and values my love accordingly—despises me, in short,’ added Jerry, bitterly, ‘and I am without the means of undeceiving her.’

‘He despises me for my humble origin, and even as much as admitted that his friends would view a *mésalliance* with contempt—yes, that was the word,’ was the thought of Bella; ‘yet his debts and the mortgages together made his royal highness stoop to act the lover to me. Surely, after the past, I deserved something better than this!’

He knew and she knew that for some time before their affair had been looked upon as ‘a case;’ that men began to make way for him whenever she was concerned, and that, in short, they would soon get talked about if they did not come to terms or separate; and now the separation had come to pass in a way neither could have foreseen.

A man like Jerry, who rode to hounds and at hurdle races, who shot, fished, rowed, and did everything else with such hearty good-will, was little likely ‘to play the fool with his little girl,’ thought Mr. Chevenix;

from whom Bella had no concealments. He could not be base enough, but Mr. Chevenix knew not what to think, and in the first transport of his anger, but for her piteous appeals, would have foreclosed the mortgages, and perhaps thus have forced Jerry out of the Queen's service.

Any way, she must try not to love him now; love was over, she thought, and she would never, never love again.

Jerry would no doubt marry some one else—especially if money was his object, as she doubted not it was; and they—who were so near being very dear to each other—might meet in years to come as mere acquaintances, if even that! Her eyes filled with tears, and she drummed her little foot passionately on the floor at the visions she conjured up, and felt how difficult it is to obliterate or transfer affection at a moment's notice.

One moment she would say to herself that she never wished to see her lover's face

again, especially if all, or even a half, were true that his mother and cousin hinted of his character, and all she suspected of his selfishness and pride; and the next moment she did *so* long to see him once more, and made herself utterly miserable with the fear that he might return to Aldershot without visiting the village again.

And so these two, who certainly loved each other well, and might have done so fondly and dearly for life, were both making themselves miserable through a very natural mistake—Bella deeming Jerry selfish and vain, Jerry deeming her views of him unjust, or that his love was what she suspected it to be, the outcome of cold-blooded policy, crushing inborn and absurd pride of family and position!

So Bella's mind was in a whirl of contending emotions; one time striving to believe in her lover's good faith, and the next endorsing the opinion of her good, easy, and affectionate father: that he had but one

object in view—those horrible mortgages.

It was while the latter views were uppermost in her angry thoughts that Jerry Wilmot—his leave having expired, and he and Bevil Goring on the eve of their return to Aldershot camp—rode over to the village to pay a farewell call.

Bella saw him from the window riding down the village street and across the green, and her heart beat wildly as she gave breathlessly a hurried message to one of the servants, and then rushed upstairs to her room. She heard Jerry inquire for Mr. Chevenix. He was from home. Then he asked for Miss Chevenix, and was told that she was at home, but had a headache, and was unable to receive visitors.

Jerry hesitated; he knew well enough that in society ‘a headache,’ when ladies were concerned, meant ‘not at home;’ and, leaving a card with P. P. C. pencilled in a corner thereof, turned his horse’s head, and, quitting the village at a canter, never once looked back.

Thus Bella, by yielding to a momentary gust of pride and temper, prompted by her then mood of mind, lost the only opportunity that might ever occur of having the cloud that hovered between them dispelled, and some explanation perhaps made.

But 'lovers from time immemorial have always shown much dexterity in the mismanagement of their own affairs,' says a novelist, and thus this pair were no exception to the general rule.

'Well,' he muttered, as his canter increased to a gallop, 'absence is a curative process; and absence in Africa will be an exciting addition thereto.'

Bella, as she wept on seeing him disappear, was not aware of one circumstance that made Jerry spur his horse viciously. As he entered the village at one end he had seen Lord Twesildown riding out of it at the other, and, not unnaturally, he connected Bella's 'headache' with that circumstance; but the young lord's appearance

there was, in reality, the merest chance contingency in the world.

‘He was not one bit in love with me,’ thought Bella, when days succeeded each other in slow and monotonous succession, and Jerry came no more. ‘Well, he has inflicted a sore blow upon my woman’s vanity.’

She became moped and full of *ennui*; day followed day in monotonous succession, and she sat by a window with a novel in her hand unread, or some piece of feminine work forgotten, listlessly watching the leafless and dripping trees, for the season was dreary, wet, and stormy; the mist crept up from the adjacent stream and whitened all the gardens and the village green; and a cold, a sheeny, a wan crescent moon came out over Wilmot Woods.

‘What a life I live just now!’ sighed Bella; ‘one might as well be in one’s grave as here at Wilmothurst.’

CHAPTER VI.

AT ALDERSHOT.

SOME weeks had now passed since Bevil Goring last saw Alison Cheyne—weeks that seemed as ages to him!

If weeks seem interminable when a pair of hopeful lovers are thus separated and can count to a day when they shall meet again, absence 'making their hearts grow fonder,' what must they seem to those who are hopelessly apart and kept in utter ignorance of each other's movements, thoughts, and plans!

Mrs. Trelawney at Chilcote Grange heard nothing of her young friend, or of Lord Cadbury, and though the movements of the 'upper ten' are pretty accurately chronicled

in the society papers, as they are named, no record was given of those in the yacht, which Goring attributed to its voyaging in the Mediterranean; yet he thought it most singular that it had not been heard of turning up at Naples, Palermo, Civita Vecchia, Malta, or elsewhere affected by tourists and travellers.

Had Alison by this time bent to the circumstances that surrounded her—bent to her father's influence, and, in utter weariness of heart and despair of escape, accepted Lord Cadbury—been married to him perhaps?

The public prints would in these days of watchful and incessant paragraphing have duly announced such an event; but now to be destined for foreign service, and for a protracted and doubtful period, the dangers of war and climate apart, rendered the chances of their ever meeting again extremely problematical.

If there is any place in the world where

lasting or temporary care might find an antidote, it is the great camp at Aldershot, with its thousands of horse, foot, and artillery, the incessant parading and marching, bugling and drumming, and amid the sociality of a regiment, with its merry mess, 'the perfection of dinner society,' as Lever calls it; but Bevil Goring shrank from it as soon as he could, and often preferred the solitude of his leaky hut—we say leaky, for those residences erected by the economical John Bull admit both wind and rain most freely through their felt roofs and red-painted wooden walls. And therein he chummed with Jerry, now a changed and somewhat moody fellow, addicted to heavy smoking and frequent brandy and sodas.

Dalton, too, would seem not to have made much progress with the gay widow during their absence at Wilmothurst, and seemed to have seen but little of her lately.

Ere long, unless the regiment departed betimes, they would have the spring drills

before them ; but there was every prospect of a speedy move, so their comrades congratulated themselves on the chance of escaping being perhaps under canvas in the North Camp, days of toil in the Long Valley, when the eyes, nose, and ears—yea, the pores of the skin, were often filled with dust—often being under arms from 9 a.m. till 4.30 p.m., with no other rations than a mouthful of Aldershot sand. Even the prospect of fighting in the dense African bush was deemed better work than that.

One morning after tubbing, and lingering over coffee and cigars in their patrol jackets, with O'Farrel in attendance, before morning parade, the corporal who acted as regimental postman brought Goring and Jerry their letters. There was only one for the former, but several for the latter, who regarded them ruefully, and said,

‘What the devil is the use of opening them—they are all to amount of account

rendered—blue envelopes,’ and, after glancing leisurely at each, he cast it into the fire. ‘I thought so! That —— tailor in the Strand. I gave him a remittance two years ago; should be thankful if he is ever paid at all. Account for a bracelet—got that in Bond Street for Emily; that vet’s account for my horse; Healy’s for boots of all kinds—pomades, gloves—no fellow can do without them; but then there is the interest accumulating on these mortgages, and as I won’t pick up much prize money, though it is the Gold Coast we are bound for, I’ll be up a tree one of these days. But, hollo, Bevil, old man, what does your solitary epistle contain?’ he suddenly exclaimed, when, on glancing at his friend, he saw that the latter had changed colour, that he became very pale and then flushed red, while, as he read over his letter for the third time, his hands trembled so much that the paper rustled.

Goring then passed one hand across his forehead as if a little bewildered, and handed the document to Jerry, saying,

‘Read for yourself.’

‘Does it concern Miss Cheyne?’ asked Jerry.

‘Please God it may in time,’ was the curious reply of Goring, as he put a dash of brandy into his coffee, and then looked over the shoulder of Jerry to re-peruse his letter again.

It ran thus :

‘Gray’s Inn Square.

‘DEAR SIR,

‘We have the pleasure to inform you that by the death of your father’s much respected cousin, Bevil Goring, Esq., of Chowringee, Calcutta, you have become his heir to a fortune of considerably above £20,000 per annum in India stock, bank shares, Central India and other railway shares, &c., the items of which we shall send you fully detailed in a few days. We shall

take all the necessary measures about proving the will, and, trusting that we shall be continued as your legal advisers, we are, dear sir, yours faithfully,

‘TAYPE, SHAWRPE, AND SCRAWLY,
‘Solicitors.’

More accustomed to wealth, and personally less interested in the document, Jerry took in the situation at once.

‘Whoop!’ he exclaimed, as he wrung Goring’s hand. ‘Whoop and hurrah! I congratulate you, I do, from my heart and soul, old fellow. There is not a soul in the Brigade deserves good fortune more than you do. What a trump this old Bevil was to die just in the nick of time, before the route came!’

‘What do you mean by that, Jerry?’

‘You’ll be sending in your papers—cutting the Rifles now. A fortune, by Jove—I always knew you had expectations, as they are called.’

‘Every fellow has; they are often, too often, bad things to rely upon; and yet how few—how very few amongst us can resist the temptation of doing so in some fashion or other. But as for quitting the corps—with war rumours in the air too—by Jove, that is the last thing I should think of doing.’

‘Egad! What a night we’ll have of it at the mess hut to-night—a jolly deep drink, and have the band out!’

‘I wish this fortune—money or whatever it is—had only come a little sooner,’ said Goring, as his thoughts fled at once to the absent Alison.

‘Better late than never!’

‘There sounds the bugle, and now for every-day life, and a truce to the world of dreams, if possible! What a lot I shall be able to do now for the men of my company—their wives and little ones—for the corps generally!’

‘Only take care that the mess don’t begin to look upon you as their factor, and be

seized with a singular desire to possess your autograph. I know what that sort of thing means,' added Jerry, as his mind wandered to Mr. Chevenix and the mortgages.

'The worst of being poor is that one can never follow one's inclinations for good.'

'Or for evil,' added Jerry, cynically.

Never in his life before did Bevil Goring pass so extraordinary a time as in the parade of that morning. In the pre-occupation of his mind he made such a number of mistakes that the colonel and adjutant—knowing that he was one of their most perfect officers—were at their wits' end with surprise; though on parade, as in anything else, a man may act correctly and acquit himself by mere force of habit, with Goring, in this instance, it was not so.

It was not the fortune that had so suddenly accrued to him, nor the amplitude thereof, which affected him thus; it was only because the said fortune—'the filthy lucre, the root of all evil,' as it is wrongly stigma-

tised—might be, with him, the means of a great and happy end.

It might be the means, ere too late, of saving Alison Cheyne from a life of misery, could he only discover her ; but where was she ? In what direction was he to turn his steps—for that he would search, he had resolved, if the corps did not depart, as seemed too probable, in a short time now.

Amid the routine of the parade these busy thoughts filled his brain, and in ‘telling off’ the battalion, when Dalton called out ‘Number one, Right Company,’ Goring responded with ‘No. 20,000, Left Company,’ at least so Jerry Wilmot asserted.

All rejoiced in the good fortune of Goring, for he was a favourite with people generally, and, as for the members of his battalion of the Rifle Brigade, he was a ‘pet,’ with them all, from the colonel down to the youngest little bugle boy ; they loved him for his good temper, good heart, and the strict impartiality with which he discharged his duties to all.

In the dawn of fresh hopes and the confidence which having a well-lined pocket gives, he found himself at mess, joining heartily in the laughter his own mistakes created, and 'standing' many rounds of champagne in response to the congratulations of his brother officers on all hands.

He felt that wealth gave power.

'Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law,' says Goldsmith.

In wealth he was still inferior to Cadbury, and the latter was a peer, he—Bevil Goring—was a gentleman by many descents, and that, he knew, counted much by Sir Ranald Cheyne.

Could he but trace the latter now!

'Letters of Readiness' came, and it was fully announced that the corps was destined to take part in the war against Ashantee; but, with all his military ardour, his zeal for the service and desire to add to the distinction he had already won in India, Bevil Goring,—situated as he was with regard to Alison

Cheyne, with his great chance of losing her for ever—was not sorry when he found he was one of those ‘detailed’ for the *dépôt*, and would thus, for a time at least, be left behind in England, and free to search and look about him.

But before the ‘Queen’s morning drum’ has announced in Aldershot the morning on which the regiments march for embarkation—and before Bevil Goring discovers the lost traces of his lost love—we have the two last appeals to record of two pairs of lovers, appeals which had very different sequels eventually; and the first we shall relate is that of Jerry Wilmot.

CHAPTER VII.

JERRY'S LAST APPEAL.

‘**T**HE last time we three shall ride out of this gate together. Whenever I do anything with a conviction that it is for the last time, I always feel unconsciously a kind of sadness come over me. What do you think, Jerry?’

The speaker was Goring, as he, Dalton, and Jerry Wilmot quitted the North Camp on horseback and separated—the two former, in hunting costume, to have a ‘spin’ with the Royal Buckhounds, the latter to the household at Wilmothurst, to which an hour or two more brought him by train; and to the last interview with his mother, one brief enough—too brief for Jerry’s taste, as

he found Lady Wilmot—afternoon tea over—preparing to pay some carriage visits in the vicinity.

Her French maid, Mademoiselle Florine, was in the act of dressing ‘her ladyship’s hair, and, as that was a very important matter, she could barely turn her head to bid farewell to Jerry, who stood near her looking irresolute, reproachful, and wistful with his heart and his eyes full together.

Lady Julia Wilmot, whilom a graceful beauty—a handsome woman still—had a theory that worry of any kind told unfavourably on the female face, that thought wrinkled the forehead, puckered the eyes and mouth, and consequently she never thought or worried herself about anything, and therefore was wonderfully young-looking and smooth-visaged for her years—being one of the best preserved women in England.

She had a marquise air of bygone days about her, as the flattering Mademoiselle

Florine often said, and suggesting to her mind patches and powdered hair, a long stomacher, hoop or sacque, and pomander ball.

‘Actually going, and to that horrid place, my poor boy,’ she said, without quite turning her face towards him. ‘You should have gone into the Guards, Jerry, and have done your soldiering in Pall Mall and at Windsor.’

‘The Guards, mother,’ exclaimed Jerry, as he thought of his mortgages. ‘Before I return, if I ever return at all, you may have to cut down the Wilmot woods, and put down your carriages and horses.’

‘Why, and for what?’

‘To pay Mr. Chevenix his overdue interest.’

‘Don’t talk of him. I detest his name. By the way, Twesildown calls there occasionally, I believe, the result of your introduction at the ball—and has given the girl a huge fox-terrier.’

‘A fox-terrier. Curious present for a lady.’

‘Very suitable in this instance, I should say.’

‘And now, mother dearest—good-bye.’

Her cold manner and frigid kiss from her half-turned face, as Florine brushed out her hair, pained him. He gave her another farewell glance, and as he saw her slim figure, her perfect feet and hands, her placid face and still magnificent hair, which Mademoiselle Florine was deftly manipulating, he felt that all her retention of apparent youth was due to her utter want of heart; and, after receiving a somewhat effusive kiss from Cousin Emily, he thought of betaking himself to the path that led to the house of Mr. Chevenix.

Albeit, used as he was to his aristocratic mother’s fashionable demeanour and coldness of heart, Jerry’s grew sore at the general mode and tenor of his farewell under all the circumstances. Thus he clung more fondly to the hope that Bella Chev-

enix might be more tender, and send him away with kindly thoughts of home and Old England.

He passed through the drawing-room, where his mother and cousin had just had their afternoon tea. It was flooded with sunlight, and the delicate Wedgwood china, and silver tea equipage, were yet on the blue velvet gipsy table. It was a magnificent apartment; flowers from the conservatory were in old-fashioned china bowls on the marble consoles, and in rich majolica jardinières between the windows; and Jerry sighed as he gave a farewell glance and turned away.

His mother might be deprived of all that luxury ere he returned to look upon it again, if—as he said before—he ever returned at all; for many were doubtless doomed to leave their bones amid the primeval forests that overshadowed the Prah river and the wild jungles of horrible Coomassie.

The somewhat pert Mademoiselle Florine, who looked as if she had no objection should the handsome Jerry have kissed *her*, began to sob when he withdrew, an emotion which 'my Lady' at once snubbed by a calm, steady, and enquiring stare, for she was a cold, proud woman, who, with all her remains of undoubted beauty, had outlived all the memory of her youth, and the genial impulses of her youth, if she ever had them. And she had to the fullest extent that which a writer curiously styles 'the intense vulgarity which passes by the name of high-breeding.'

Remembering—he had never forgotten it—the tenor of his last conversation with Bella Chevenix and the way in which it ended, it was not without a doubt whether he could see her if alone, and with a certain clamorous emotion in his heart, that Jerry Wilmot—the usually jolly and unabashed Jerry—approached the great red-bricked square villa that overlooked the village

green, and the walls of which were covered by masses of Virginia creepers, roses, and clematis in summer.

'Mr. Chevenix was out—had ridden over to Langley Park,' was the response of the domestic who received Jerry's card.

'Ah, considers it his own property, like the other places, no doubt,' was the thought of Jerry, without anger, however.

'Miss Chevenix?'

'Is at home, sir.'

Another moment, and he was face to face with the smiling and brilliant Bella, who received him with somewhat of a flutter. A hot colour swept through the girl's soft face, and, retiring as suddenly, left her rather pale.

'I hope I don't intrude on you,' said Jerry, seized with a curious access of bashfulness. 'I find you sitting, full of thought, with your head on one side, like a canary.'

'Was I?' said she, caressing a great fox-terrier, with a plated collar—Twesildown's present, no doubt, thought Jerry.

The latter had called in the hope of having a solemn leave-taking, if not something better—one of those eternal adieux peculiar, he thought, to heroes and heroines in novels and plays; thus he was rather bewildered to find that Bella began to run on in a style of conversation (adopted to cover her own nervousness or chagrin) that was ‘sparkling;’ thus she chatted away, without waiting for answers, on subjects culled from the society papers, fashionable journals, and so forth, leaving him for a time, as he thought, ‘unable to get a word in, even edgeways,’ till he announced to her that ‘the battalion had received its letters of readiness, and that the route had come.’

At these tidings her manner and colour changed at once, and her voice and eyes softened, as she said,

‘And you are really going away?’

‘At last.’

‘At last!’

‘To Ashanti.’

'Yes, to Ashanti,' he replied.

Each seemed as if afraid to trust themselves to words of their own. What he was doing while he spoke he scarcely knew; but he was trying to fit on the top of his fingers in succession a tiny silver thimble picked from her work-basket, and in every case without success.

The doubts in the mind of each still kept the cold cloud between them—she believing that the love he might speak of again was prompted by worldly selfishness combating with family pride: he fearing that she received his love as inspired by fear of the mortgages alone.

'Surely this is very sudden?' said she, after a pause.

'Oh no, we have expected a move for some time past—you will miss me, I hope?'

'We have not seen much of you lately.'

'However, I should like to take with me into my place of exile—for such I deem it

—a knowledge, a hope that you did miss me a little.’

Bella was about to reply, what she knew not, but a choking emotion came into her white, slender throat. Jerry saw the emotion, and gathering courage, said,

‘Do you remember, Bella, that more than once I had struggled with the love with which you had inspired me till I could keep the secret no longer.’

Jerry was still on the wrong tack, and was again terribly misunderstood. Bella’s pride and indignation came again to her aid, and she replied, with a haughty smile,

‘I am not likely to forget, Captain Wilmot: women do not forget such speeches, or when a friend takes up the *rôle* of a lover; but, after what you *did* say, we can never be the same to each other again.’

‘What did I say?’ he exclaimed, regarding her earnestly and wistfully. ‘I remember that I made you an honest and straight-

forward avowal of the love that was in my heart, Bella.'

'Perhaps—but I only remember the terms in which you did make it,' replied Bella, in whose mind the unfortunate and misconstrued term 'contempt of his world' was rankling.

'Once again, Bella,' said he, with his hand stretched out towards her, and a great expression of entreaty in his eyes—'will you be my wife—will you marry me?'

'It cannot be,' said she, with a firmness that was not entirely assumed; 'but let us part friends.'

'Nothing more?' he asked, sadly.

'Nothing more,' she replied, in a choking voice.

In her angry pride of heart, one moment she had gone near to hating him, but she does not hate him now—oh, far, far from it, when looking upon the handsome and earnest face, as perhaps she may be doing

for the last time, but, so far as her words go, she is as unyielding as ever. A little indignation at her hardness began to gather in Jerry's heart, and he said, in a light tone of reproach,

‘Of course, it is too much to expect an English girl to give up—on a sudden, too—the comforts of an English home, the prospect of a season in London and another at Brighton, to broil with a poor devil on the Gold Coast, and share a South African bungalow.’

Bella took a peculiar view of this speech, and believed it was a sudden way of ‘shelving herself,’ as she had refused him. She knew nothing of the military etiquette and iron rule that prevented an officer from quitting in any way after letters of readiness came, and thought that Jerry might retire when he pleased, marry and keep his wife at home. She gave a little disdainful smile and remained silent, so Jerry spoke again—

‘When I was a big boy in knickerbockers,

and you were a little girl in short frocks, we used to be like Paul and Virginia in the Wilmot Woods.'

'Well, Paul and Virginia have grown up, and the young lady has come to her senses.'

'If the gentleman has not.'

'He has come to his senses too, and has his eyes very wide open indeed.'

'She is referring to those infernal mortgages,' thought Jerry (which was the case), 'and how shall I ever undeceive her?'

'In our boy and girl time you would have trusted me,' he urged.

'Perhaps, but I did not know you as I do now, and the world you live in.'

'The past, Bella ——'

'Is past, Captain Wilmot; let us not refer to it again. I do not understand you.'

'May I—can I—dare I explain?' he began, impetuously.

'Certainly not—there is nothing I wish explained,' said she, warmly, though tears were in her eyes, and, as they seemed to be

almost 'sparring now,' Jerry rose to withdraw, yet lingered, with a heavy, loving, and angry heart, and said,

'To me you are in no way what you were once, Bella, and what I hoped you might have been. When I was last in Wilmot-hurst I saw that puppy Twesildown hovering about; surely you—you don't encourage him?'

This was a blunt and unfortunate speech, for Bella's brown eyes sparkled as she asked, hotly,

'How dare you think, much less ask, if I would encourage anyone?'

'I don't know—pardon me; I scarcely know what I think or what I say.'

'So it seems.'

Both were standing now, but apart. Oh, how Jerry longed to take her in his arms and pour his farewell kisses on her lips and hair and eyes; but this was not to be.

'How hard you are with me!' said he, after a pause.

‘Have you deserved that I should be otherwise?’

‘My mother has said——’

‘Oh, I am infinitely obliged to Lady Julia for her opinion of me, of course,’ said Bella, cresting up her beautiful head; ‘but what *has* she said of me?’

‘That you are the greatest flirt in Hampshire, and that, young as you are, you have flirted with every man that came near you.’

‘I think you must know more of me than she does, and may know how much of all this is true; but she told me the same of you, and even more, and that she could not get you off to your regiment soon enough.’

‘Why?’ asked Jerry, with surprise.

‘Because of a *tendresse* for her own maid; and that you have been making love to every woman and girl since. But all this gossip does not concern me, so let the conversation end. You came to bid me good-bye?’

‘Yes,’ said Jerry, in a hard tone.

‘Had you not better bid papa good-bye too? I think I heard him come in.’

She put her hand upon the bell.

‘Stay one moment—stay!’ he said, imploringly.

She looked down and played nervously with the silver bangles on her wrists, some of them the gift of Jerry in happier moments.

‘Consider once again,’ said he, brokenly; ‘think of what my life will be apart from you. Will you dream of me when I am gone?’

‘Why should I dream—and dreams come unbidden?’

‘Think of me, then?’

‘A waste of time surely. I shall have much to think of—papa and my poor people.’

‘Why do you speak like this to me?’ he said, with a flash of indignation. ‘Is it because each day sees me a poorer and your father a richer man? or has another touched your heart?’

An angry smile curled her lip at this question. She recollected the scene in the conservatory, and remembered it has been said that 'a woman never yields an inch, however innocently and generously, to a man that he does not suspect her, sooner or later, of having given way in a similar manner to some man who has come *earlier*.'

'I listen to all this too late. I know your motive. I thank you for the honour you condescend to do me, but let the matter end,' said Bella, while a shuddering sigh escaped her pale lips, for her respiration came in little proud gasps and her heart throbbed painfully—painfully for the part that pride inspired, and a doubt of the purity of Jerry's love, though at the time loving him dearly herself. It was every way a curious situation, and at last Jerry took up his hat and gloves.

'We have been somewhat apart of late,' said he; 'yet I do not wish—that—that we should part coldly.'

‘Oh no; why should we?’ she asked, in her sweetest tone. ‘I am,’ she thought, ‘in reality—but for the encumbrances on his estate—nothing more to him than all the other girls he has talked to, laughed with, and flirted with, as his cold hard mother told me. So let me be on my guard—on my guard!’

‘You will—most probably—be married before I return, if I ever return at all, which God only can foresee,’ he said.

‘I may never marry,’ said Bella, with a curious ring in her voice.

‘But you *will* think of me, Bella, won’t you—broiling and fighting in far away Africa—won’t you? I would not like to think that you quite forgot me.’

‘Nor shall I,’ said she, making a super-human effort to repress her tears.

‘Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye.’

He was gone—gone, and no kiss was exchanged between those two—only a

clinging pressure of the hand, and that was all!

Could it be that, after all, he was no more to her—through her misconception and doubt of him—than a stick or a stone? If her assumed calm covered—as it really did—a sore, sore heart, how was he to know it?

With her hands interlaced above her head, as if to stay the throbbing of her brain, and her swelling eyes cast upward, she said, in a husky voice,

‘If I have erred, oh! may heaven protect him, and make his life happy in some other way!’

However, she did not say with *another*.

When Jerry was fairly gone, it seemed to Bella that an unnatural stillness—a hush fell over all the house. She threw open a window to court the cool atmosphere, for her temples were hot and quivering; she could hear the murmur of the stream and the rustle of the trees, in shadow now, as

the sun had crept round to the back of the house, and a gloom was falling on the landscape, even as a gloom was sinking on her heart; and she began to upbraid herself with hardness and cruelty, and to feel she might never know rest again.

And Jerry's voice lingered in her ears, as the expression of his face clung to her memory, and, in a sudden revulsion of feeling, she wailed in her heart—

'Oh, he is going away, and I have acted a cruel part to him—away to face death, and our parting seems like a farewell of the dying; and his love for me may be true, tender, and honest, after all! If so, what will he—what must he think of me? But it is over and done with—over and done with now!'

And she took refuge in floods of bitter, bitter tears. When, for good or for evil, for love and for peace, should she see Jerry Wilmot again? Too probably, never more!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GAME THAT TWO CAN PLAY.

GORING and Dalton had gone to a meet of the Royal Buckhounds, as we have stated in the preceding chapter, and the day's run had been a brilliant one. The gathering took place at Salt Hill again, and there was a large field, comprising the Master of the Hounds, the usual followers of the latter, and a vast assemblage of spectators, on whom the two officers looked with some interest, as it might be the last time they might see such a sight again— together at least.

The hounds ran the deer by Stoke Park to Farnham village, near which he got hung up in a wire fence, but broke away to the

left and got shelter in Brocas Wood, but only for a time. Driven out by the dogs, and followed by a vast field, including many men in pink with faultless tops, and not a few ladies, he was taken at last in Hedgerley Park.

Somewhere thereabout, at the close of the run, Goring lost sight of Dalton, who, when leaping his horse over a hedge into a lane, nearly came in contact with Mrs. Trelawney, who had also been at the meet, but by him unseen hitherto. The animal she rode reared wildly, but she soothed it, and Dalton caught it by the bridle.

‘Pray pardon me,’ he exclaimed; ‘had I been a little nearer——’

‘You might have unhorsed me,’ said she, laughing.

She looked very bright and handsome in her riding-habit; the *chef-d’œuvre* of some London tailor, it fitted her to perfection, and, being of a bright blue colour, suited her brilliant complexion and blond style

of beauty. A French writer says, 'There is but one way in which a woman can be handsome, but a hundred thousand in which she can be pretty ;' and Mrs. Trelawney had those ways in perfection.

Since his last visit Dalton had not seen her, and many of the speeches she had in her petulance or pride permitted herself to say rankled in his memory, exciting anger, sorrow, and surprise ; while she, on her part, had been thinking that she had gone quite far enough in the game she was playing with him—for that she was playing a *game* we shall ere long show—and had been anxiously hoping he would come to Chilcote Grange at least once more ere the departure of his regiment, of which event she had heard a rumour, but he never came.

There was a little constraint in the manner of both, but being too natural to act, it soon passed off.

'I was just thinking of you, curious to say, when you came flying over that hedge,'

said Mrs. Trelawney, with a smile in her bright, bewitching hazel eyes, while the dark lashes that fringed their white lids seemed to flicker. Oh, those wonderful hazel eyes! thought Dalton, as he replied.

‘Well, it is said to be always a good point in a man’s favour when a pretty woman thinks about him in any way. And what were you thinking?’

‘That I was certain we had not seen the last of each other—you remember I said so.’

‘It is my last day with the hounds. Tomorrow my horses go to Tattersall’s. And you have done us the honour of following the field to-day?’ he added, as they rode slowly side by side.

‘No—I only came to see them throw off, and am now riding home.’

‘A pretty mare that of yours, and takes her fences like a bird, Goring told me.’

‘I never engage in these sports that way now.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I am getting too old,’ she replied, with a pretty demure expression.

‘Old—is this a joke!’

‘Besides, I must be careful of myself for little Nettie’s sake. If aught happened to me——’

‘You are an expert whip—here is a low hedge, and I shall be charmed to give you a lead.’

‘Thanks—no ; I would rather not.’

How soldierly Tony Dalton looked, she was thinking, with his bronzed complexion, thoughtful, dark eyes, his dark shorn hair, and long moustache a shade darker, his erect and well-knit figure sitting well down in his saddle, his hunting-coat soiled and stained by service and exposure to the weather.

‘Then you have seen enough of the sport?’ said he.

‘Quite, and am now taking the road homeward.’

‘Permit me to escort you.’

She bowed her assent. There was no reason why he should not do so, and an expression of triumph made her eyes sparkle, and then she asked—

‘Has Captain Goring utterly failed as yet to discover a trace of where Miss Cheyne has sailed to, or rather of where her father has taken her?’

‘Yes—quite.’

‘It is very singular—people don’t disappear in that way now-a-days. Poor Goring; he is, I know, so passionately attached to her, but her father’s opposition is so resolute that I think he should school himself——’

‘To relinquish her? oh, no—we cannot control our love, Mrs. Trelawney—can we?’

‘I think not.’

‘If we could—if we could——’

‘What a deal of trouble would be spared us in this world,’ said she, laughing; ‘but Sir Ranald Cheyne is, no doubt, still unaware that Captain Goring is now a very

rich man, and will, I hear, remain in England for a little time yet.'

'A little time only; the transport awaits us at Southampton; we are all in readiness, and the order to march may come at any hour. This is the last time we may see each other,' he said, in a suddenly somewhat broken voice; 'and perhaps it is as well, Laura—I have seen too much of you—too much for my own peace.'

'Captain Dalton,' said she, looking him direct in the eyes, 'you have tried to woo me. I need not mince words or matters with you, but I have one question to ask.'

'Ask it,' said he, huskily.

'Are you at liberty to woo any woman honestly, honourably?'

Dalton grew very pale, but he replied, evasively,

'I have loved against my will—against my conscience—though your very name should have repressed that love.'

'My name!'

‘Your name of Laura.’

The name left his lips, as she remarked it had done before, in an unwilling manner, as if it were familiar, yet most distasteful.

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘I knew *another* Laura, and she—but let me not think of her at this moment when I feel that I love you with a passion that I have sought in vain to overcome.’

‘Why?’ she asked, impetuously.

‘Because there are hopeless obstacles between us.’

‘I have none,’ was her somewhat pointed reply.

‘But I have,’ said he, while bead-drops coursed from his temples; and she regarded him curiously through her veil, and said,

‘Then you should never have addressed me at all in the language of a lover. I had good reason to suspect something of this kind,’ she continued, in a tone of severity.

‘And hence it was that you always spoke so enigmatically to me.’

‘Perhaps.’

‘As one who would judge of a man by his past history rather than by his capacity for good in the future, and so judged me harshly.’

He stooped from his saddle, and suddenly kissed her gloved hand. As he did so she heard him whisper, as if to himself,

‘My darling—my darling—without destroying your honour and my own, I can hope for no nearer caress. Pardon me,’ he added, aloud.

When he raised his head, she saw that his face was deadly pale; but again the smile of triumph glittered in her half-closed hazel eyes as she merely said,

‘Captain Dalton, you have all the gallantry of a Spaniard, and seem inclined to pass the *rôle* of Platonic affection I accorded to you; but you must pardon me if I mean resolutely to live in my past.’

‘We cannot—ought not to live for the dead alone,’ said Dalton.

‘It is said that we bury our dead out of our sight, and may try to forget them, otherwise the world would not go on as it does. We may bury our dead—true, but memory remains.’

‘How she must have loved that fellow Trelawney,’ thought Dalton, with jealousy and sorrow.

‘May there not be kindred souls that often meet too late?’ she asked.

‘And you apply this to yourself and me?’

‘Yes.’

‘I always thought that such ideas of kindred thought and passionate enthusiasm occurred only in youth, and were the result of propinquity and daily intercourse.’

‘How coldly you respond to me!’

‘After the mysterious *obstacle* you so openly referred to, what would you have me do or say?’ she asked, with a certain hauteur of tone, and then gave one of her merry little laughs.

Dalton could not help thinking that the

alternate hauteur and mirth of the handsome widow at his grave, solemn, and earnest love-making were—to say the least of them—exceedingly ill-timed, while her pretty apparent indifference to the strength of the passion that filled his soul, especially when on the eve of his departure to a distant land, piqued and exasperated him.

‘Can the woman be a “free-lance,” though still in society?’ he surmised, with pain in his heart, for, ‘free-lance’ or not, he felt that he loved her—yea, madly—as only men at his age often do love a woman. He knew that she was deemed by some what they termed rather a ‘debatable widow,’ whom the social police in the vicinity of Aldershot, where she had rather suddenly appeared—police who consist of embittered spinsters, inquisitive matrons with unmarried daughters, whom her dazzling beauty eclipsed, were rather addicted to ‘tearing to pieces,’ a process which Mrs. Trelawney treated with profound indiffer-

ence or disdain. There was a bold, gay *bonhomie* about her that might be no more than a mere delight in the things of this life, a pretty playfulness and recklessness of spirit that passed in a handsome young matron, and which the 'social police' resented, adding 'that admiration was food and drink to her.' "Free-lance" or not,' he thought again; 'to see is to admire, to know her is to love her; but she laughs at my passion as if it were that of a love-sick boy.'

'Would to God I had never met you!' said he, 'for the meeting has ruined a life that, but for you, if not a happy, was at least a contented one.'

'Ruined *your* life!' she exclaimed, as if with surprise.

'Yes; and I shall cross your path no more. Our lives are shaped out for us to a great extent, and mine was planned out for me by others. Oh, by what infernal fatality have you, too, the name of Laura!'

‘It was, I suppose, given me by my god-fathers and godmothers. You seem to be familiar with it,’ she added, with one of her merriest laughs.

Dalton knew that a lover laughed at has a lost cause; he knew too—fatally for his own peace—that the love he had for weeks upon weeks past been striving to stifle in his breast, was a love that he had no right to offer; but her reception of it stung him deeply, and in reply to her laughter he said, gravely and steadily,

‘Then I am to understand that you have been amusing yourself with me—simply flirting to keep your hand in, Mrs. Trelawney?’ he asked, in a voice that was intensely low and clear.

‘Precisely so,’ she said, with a nod and a saucy smile; ‘playing the game that always requires two to play it.’

‘What game?’

‘Love-making.’

‘Cruel—cruel! God may forgive you,

but I never will!' he exclaimed, and wheeling round his horse, galloped furiously away.

How astonished Dalton would have been could he have seen the change that came over the face and manner of the lady he had just left so abruptly.

Her eyes flashed with joyous triumph, yet they were full of welling tears; her lip quivered; her cheeks were deeply flushed; an agitation beyond her control made her whole form to vibrate; and as she struck her gloved hands together she exclaimed, in a low and fervent voice, with almost a sob in it, 'At last—at last I have completely triumphed—have ground him to the dust! At last he loves me, and I have conquered his cold, proud heart!'

Then leaping lightly as a girl from her horse, on reaching her own gate, she passionately embraced and kissed little Netty again and again, greatly to the bewilderment of the child, who had never seen her mother so agitated before.

That night she despatched a note to the camp requesting Captain Dalton to visit her again.

All the next day passed, and no answer came.

Her excitement became intense ; she sent a messenger to the North Camp to make inquiries, and he returned with the, to her, now most startling tidings that the Rifles had marched that morning for embarkation, and that her note was lying undelivered in the empty hut of Captain Dalton, who had left the lines for Southampton.

She had boasted to him laughingly and with affected pride and bitterness of the game she had been playing. She had held a trump card in her hand, and now it seemed that she had played and lost it.

‘ I have gone too far, too far, and now may lose him altogether, and after all—after all !’ she exclaimed, with genuine dismay.

CHAPTER IX.

'THE ROUTE!'

IT was so; those comfortless wooden wigwams in the lines of the North Camp, which had known the Rifles for so many months, now, in the words of the Book of Job, knew them no more; and nothing of the smart but sombre battalion now remained there save a few soldiers—recruits whose training was not complete, or men whose time of service was nearly expired.

The mess had been broken up, its massive and trophied service of plate packed up and placed in the charge of Goring, who had command of the fragment of the battalion left behind. The senior captain of a regiment was never employed on this duty, as,

for obvious reasons, his presence at headquarters is always desirable.

On the eventful morning of their march from camp the gallant battalion of the 'Prince Consort's Own' scarcely knew themselves in their new 'Ashanti toggery,' as they called it, which was furnished from the stores at Pimlico, and consisted, for each man, of a grey tweed tunic, resembling a shooting-jacket, suitable for the climate, with ample pockets; belt and trousers of the same material, and rough canvas leggings; the head-dress, a light grey Indian helmet, perhaps the first time such a thing had been worn on British ground.

Soldier-like looked the Rifles in their black belts and their heavy marching order, with knapsacks, haversacks, great-coats, canteens, and water-bottles.

If there was little of the pomp and circumstance of war in this costume, by repetition in numbers and by uniformity in the mass it did not seem unimposing; and if

splendour was wanting, certainly enthusiasm was not, and loud and hearty were the cheers that rang along the Lines from one street of huts to another, as the grey column, preceded by the bands of several corps, began its short march to the railway which was to convey it to Southampton just as the red sun of November, the pioneer of winter, shone out through clouds that had a ragged and dreary look in a grey and gloomy sky.

The moorlands around Aldershot were odorous with withered bracken, and a stray heron might have been seen, perhaps, at Fleet Pond, motionless amid the water as if sculptured in bronze; in the adjacent thickets the woodsman was going forth, armed with axe and bill-hook, his dog close behind him, heedless of war and its accompaniments, pausing, perhaps, as he heard in the distance on the ambient air the crash of the brass bands that led the Rifles on the first part of the long route to terrible

Ashanti, or it might be the chorus of hundreds of manly voices shouting 'Cheer, boys, cheer,' on the wind of the early morning, but he was thinking only of the bundles of faggots on his shoulder, the crackling fire, the clean-swept hearth, the kettle on the hob, and the trim little wife that awaited him at home.

Bevil Goring was accompanying the battalion to Southampton to see the last of his friends, and to 'kill,' as he thought, 'another day of suspense,' the long and empty days of waiting with gloomy forebodings.

It seemed to him that a few hours had wrought a curious change in both Jerry Wilmot and Tony Dalton, but more especially in the latter, who from being a grave, earnest, and pleasant fellow had suddenly become morose, preoccupied, and even sullen and most impatient; one thing alone seemed to gratify him—the sudden and speedy departure to the seat of war.

'What has come to you, my dear fellow?'

asked Goring more than once; 'you look as if you were going into a fever.'

'I am in a fever of the mind, Goring,' replied Dalton, 'and I may tell you all about it before the transport sails.'

Among the crowd that assembled to see the battalion depart were many ladies on horseback. There was one under whose tightly-tied veil the hot tears were falling, as she saw Jerry march past in the strange Ashanti uniform at the head of his company; but Jerry—his sad thoughts turned inward—saw not her, and he had no prevision that she of whom his heart was so full at that moment—Bella Chevenix—was so near him.

'Time will test his truth,' thought the girl; 'true love does not die, but the false only, as it depends upon outward influences. Yet *time* may see this regiment return, and Jerry not with it—oh, God, if it should be—not with it!'

And the crash of the brass bands went

on, and the tramp of the steadily marching column, the flash of accoutrements and arms, the cheers, the chorusing, the general hubbub, all portions of a terrible phantasmagoria, amid which he was taken away from her.

Southampton was reached in due time, and by sound of bugle the battalion was 'detrained,' to use the term now in use, and marched to the steam transport which lay in those busy and stately docks, where of old the sea had ebbed and flowed upon a silent and sandy shore, and where, it is difficult now to believe, Canute the Dane sat in a chair, and took his part in that well-known incident by which he rebuked the flattery of his courtiers.

By a hand gangway the grey column defiled at once on board the ship, whose capacious womb received it. The men were speedily divided into their watches; a guard was detailed; berths were apportioned; arms racked; knapsacks hung on pegs or

cleats; bedding inspected; duck shirts and fatigue trousers served out; and so, for a time, the officers and sergeants had a busy time of it; while a thousand mysterious returns, receipts, and requisitions seemed to require the signature of the colonel and everyone else, and these were affixed on the capstan head, the gunwale, the back of the nearest soldier, or anything else that might be improvised as a table.

Incessant was the clatter of the donkey-engines as stores were taken on board, baggage, shot, shell, gatling-guns, waggons, provisions, wheel-barrows, shovels, and pickaxes in bundles. Night fell, and still the odious hurly-burly on deck and by the gaping hatchways went on, to the sound of many a merry chorus or song at times:

‘It’s no matter what you *do*,
If your heart be only *true*.
And his heart *was* true to his Poll.’

Though our soldiers are generally too young to have wives nowadays, in these

short-service times, a few years ago it was not so; thus several women of the Rifle Battalion, some with babies in their arms, had followed it to Southampton to see the last of those they might never look upon again.

‘Good-bye, my poor Mary,’ Goring heard a young soldier cry, looking wistfully to his girl-wife, who stood weeping on the quay, where she held up their baby from time to time. ‘How are you to get back to camp?’

‘Never mind, Tom darling; I’m here, anyhow.’

‘Have you any money?’

‘No.’

‘God help you, darling,’ he replied, and proceeded in a mechanical but hopeless way to investigate his pockets.

‘I’ll take her back, and all the women of ours who are here. Pass the message along, lads,’ cried Bevil Goring, who now gave a sergeant *carte blanche* to distribute money among all for what they required, and

directing them all to meet him at the railway station next morning.

‘Three cheers for Captain Goring!’ was now the cry, and many men crowded gratefully forward to salute him and shake his hand, while he felt now that he could spend some of the rupees of Bevil Goring of Chowringee to good purpose; and sure enough he met his strange detachment at the station next morning; and after giving them a hearty breakfast, including buns and cans of milk galore for the little ones, he brought them all into camp, while the transport was steaming down the waters of the Solent, and heading for the Channel.

But in this part of our narrative we are anticipating certain events which occurred at Southampton, and which Dalton and Goring, but more particularly the former, were destined to have long in their memory.

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF DALTON'S LIFE.

‘ I CANNOT understand the terms on which you say you and Mrs. Trelawney have parted,’ said Goring, to whom his most valued friend Dalton had been, as a sort of relief to his own mind, apparently making what he called ‘a clean breast of it,’ and detailing his relations with the fair widow of Chilcote Grange. ‘You seem to have made love enough to her—that I saw for myself often. You seemed to have expressed admiration enough for her, to all of which she appears to have listened with patience and pleasure in some instances; with impatience and petulance in others;

and yet you seem to have wound up with a kind of quarrel at last!

‘She acknowledged that she had only been amusing herself and befooling me.’

‘It would also seem by your own account that amid all the curious love-making you never made her a direct proposal of marriage.’

‘No.’

‘Why?’

‘I dared not,’ said Dalton, sadly.

‘You dared not—and why?’

‘Because—because I am a married man—there now, the murder is out!’

‘A married man—you, Tony Dalton!’ exclaimed Goring, in utter bewilderment.

‘I, Tony Dalton—the biggest fool in Her Majesty’s service,’ replied that personage, with a groan.

‘Does Mrs. Trelawney know of this state of affairs?’ asked Goring, after a long pause.

‘I have more than once feared as much.’

‘She hinted to me once that there was a secret in your life that precluded her reception of your addresses. Then it is so?’

‘Yes, that I am a married man,’ replied Dalton, as he threw open his dark green and silk-braided patrol jacket (which he had resumed after the march) as if its collar choked him, tossed his half-finished cigar into the blazing fire, and drained his glass only to replenish it again.

It was in a hotel at Southampton, not far from where the transport lay, when they were having a ‘farewell drink’ after a cutlet or so, that Dalton made this astounding revelation to his friend—one that seemed fully to account for many peculiarities which the latter had remarked in Dalton’s intercourse with Mrs. Trelawney.

‘Why, in the name of all that is wonderful, have you concealed this so long?’

‘An emotion of shame perhaps—shame at my own egregious folly tied my tongue.’

‘But when, where, how did it all come about?’

‘The most miserable stories are often told in a few words, and thus told best; and, Goring, I shall tell you mine,’ replied Dalton.

‘When I was being educated for the service—my parents being dead—I was boarded by my uncle Sir John Dalton—on whose hands and generosity I was utterly cast—with a tutor at Hastings.

‘My uncle was most generous. I had quarterly as much pocket-money—too much indeed—as a young fellow in his early teens could desire to have; I had a horse at my command, a pleasure-boat whenever I liked it, and was a frequent attender at the theatre; for my tutor was a careless fellow, fond of amusement too, and did not look sufficiently after me.

‘All this was some ten or twelve years ago. At the theatre there was a young girl who figured in the bills as Miss Laura

Dorillion, and who was deemed quite a star.

‘One story went that she was a lady of high family, who, in a rage for histrionic fame, had fled from home, changed her name, and adopted the stage as a profession; another story was that she was the only daughter of a man of rank, whom dissipation or bad speculations on the turf had ruined; and rumour added that, when only twelve years of age, she had played Juliet to perfection in amateur theatricals at a fashionable West End School; at fifteen she was a genius; at seventeen she was cast as Miss Hardcastle in the “School for Scandal;” and more than once when I saw her as Juliet I longed, with all my soul, to be her Romeo.

‘Boylike I fell madly in love with her—in love as dreamy boys at my then years are wont to do—and nightly I haunted the theatre, often in defiance of my tutor, and my studies became a farce; in fact they were

utterly neglected, and I had but one thought—Laura Dorillion !

‘ How pretty—how sweetly pretty—the name sounded to me, and I was never weary of repeating it to myself.

‘ *Was* she pretty, you will ask? When made-up for the stage and surrounded by all its accessories, she looked downright lovely ; but, when watching her going from her lodgings to morning rehearsal, I was obliged to confess to myself that my goddess had rather a large mouth, but fine eyes with a sleepy or dreamy expression, long lashes and drooping lids of which she could make a most seductive use ; that in figure she was tall but not ungraceful, and was neither fully grown nor developed ; but there seemed a great want of finish about her for one who was alleged to be the daughter of a noble family. This might proceed, I thought, from the style of her toilette, which certainly did not come from Swan & Edgar’s.

‘ The girl was quite a favourite in Hast-

ings ; she played for, sang for, and subscribed to many local charities, and had about her none of that fastness of dress or demeanour peculiar to so many young girls on the stage ; and so I loved her, or thought I did. I was but a boy—it was what the French—so happy in their phrases—call *un grand caprice enflammé par des obstacles*—nothing more, perhaps ; and the obstacles were my lack of independent means to take her off the stage ; my having no profession ; and my uncle's well known family pride, position, and general views regarding me, his brother's only son, and all that sort of thing. Otherwise, I might have continued “to sigh like a furnace,” and eventually, when I went elsewhere, forget her ; but it was not to be.

‘I was not a bad-looking fellow, and always dressed scrupulously well ; thus she was not long in discovering me as I sat night after night, bouquet in hand, in a certain pit stall ; and she no doubt connected

me with the beautiful bouquets that came to the stage door nightly, in more than one instance with little complimentary notes on pink and perfumed paper inserted therein.

‘Once she appeared at the wings with one of these notes in her hand. She blew me a kiss from the tips of her fingers, and placed the missive in her bosom, two little actions which raised me to the seventh heaven of ecstasy. After that Laura Dorillion sang to me, acted to me, glanced and smiled at me in a way that completed her conquest, and, in short, I was a lost Tony Dalton !

‘As a pledge of solemn engagement, I gave her a diamond and opal ring.

‘In the end I achieved an introduction in the most matter-of-fact way in the world—just as Sir Walter Scott did to his first love—by the prosaic offer of my umbrella on a wet day, and then my dream began to take a more tangible form in little lunches and solid presents, in escorting her to and from

the theatre, which became an established kind of expected duty ; in walks on the Sunday mornings along the towering cliffs that overhang the sea ; along the breezy Marina ; by the Lover's Seat in lonely Fairlight Glen with its thickly wooded sides and tapestry of wild flowers ; by the Dripping Well, that an enormous beech-tree overhangs ; among the ruins of the old castle, when "the old, old tale" was told again—not of Hastin and his men, or of Saxons or Normans—but of our love for each other, and life became to me a species of feverish intoxication for some weeks at least.

'Some little points of manner, accent, pronunciation certainly did at times jar upon my better taste ; and she seemed, for a girl educated at a West End seminary for young ladies, rather ignorant of the manners and customs of that "society" which she affected in genteel comedy to pourtray upon the stage ; but the former I attributed to association with her inferiors—to wit, the

members of the company to which she belonged.

‘From what you know of my disposition and general character, you may guess the end of all this.’

‘No—I do not,’ said Goring.

‘I married her.’

‘Whew!’ whistled Goring; ‘in church?’

‘In church! where she was given away by the manager. The “heavy old woman” acted as mother, two young ladies of the company were bridesmaids, and when, tremulously, she subscribed herself in the register Laura Dorillion, the clerk and the pew-opener gave their signatures as witnesses. The breakfast is but a confused memory. There was no rice—no old slippers; and we are told that no girl likes to be married without any of the gay things which make marriage such a joyous experience—no gay preparations—no pretty wedding in a flower-decked church—no presents—not even a new dress!’

‘Well?’

‘Then came a life of misery and jealousy. I trembled when other men went near her, and boiled with exasperation when love was openly made to her on the stage in the mere business of the play. I had seen enough of that done before with considerable placidity, but somehow I could not stand it now.

‘With my last quarter’s allowance in my pocket, and utterly vague ideas of the future in my mind, I left the house of my tutor and went to share her humble lodging in a rather obscure part of Hastings, and soon the sordid nature of our surroundings began to impress me most disagreeably, as the bubble began to burst.

‘At last there came a night which I was fated not to forget for a time.

‘I had brought her home from the theatre, where she had acquitted herself with singular skill and sweetness as blind Iolanthe in “King René’s Daughter,” and she was in the act of repeating a portion of her dialogue

with Tristan as we ascended the stair—

“ Another time,
When I had pined for many tedious days,
Because my father was detained from home,
I wept for very gladness when he came !
Through tears I gave my bursting heart relief,
And at mine eyes it found a rushing vent.”

‘ In our little sitting-room I found an elderly man, wearing a battered grey hat girt by a black band, and clad in shabby-genteel—nay, quite threadbare garments—standing on the hearthrug, smoking a short clay pipe, with his coat-tails over his arms, his bleared and tipsy-looking eyes—one of which had a white plaister over it—regarding the furniture and details of the apartment critically, while he took a sip from a pewter mug of beer, and set it down with a clank.

“ ‘ Hullo, my girl,’ he exclaimed ; ‘ here you are at last ! This here is a rum go. So this is the young gent as you have gone and made such a fool of yourself by marrying ?’ ”

‘ Laura’s heart was beating fast—so fast that even respiration seemed to suffocate

her ; her face was blanched ; her eyes had a scared expression ; and gave me a glance that seemed full of shame and agony.

“ “ Who is this impertinent scoundrel ? ” I demanded.

“ “ Scoundrel in your teeth again ! ” he exclaimed, turning up the cuffs of his coat, threateningly, and striking his battered hat firmly on his head ; “ is this your company manners, you young cub ? ” he added, with a frightful imprecation.

“ “ Who are you, and what do you want here ? ” I demanded, looking about for a stick.

“ “ Dabchick is my name ! Jo Dabchick, clown, Banger’s Circus, Surreyside o’ the river, and no mistake ; and I have come here to see my own daughter, Laura Dorillion, as she calls herself, or must it be Mrs. Antony Dalton now—Lady Dalton perhaps that’s to be, when your uncle hops his blessed twig ? ”

“ “ Oh, father, ” said Laura, in a breathless

voice, "why have you come, and how did you find me out?"

"I come because I want money; and, as for finding you out, that was easy enough; the Hastings theatre ain't at the bottom of the sea."

"And mother?"

"Is there in your bed—has had a drop too much, and so I have tucked her in there; and now what have you got for supper—tripe, sausages, bloaters, or summat tasty, I hope? Speak—you look as lively as a couple of glow-worms in the sunshine!"

'My soul sickened within me! And with these additions to our little household—a slatternly, odious mother, a beery, broken-down actor, whose line had once been genteel comedy, a clown in a circus latterly, but whose incessant dissipation had deprived him of all employment—life became a burden now, and my stupendous folly stood in letters of fire before me.

‘Existence became unendurable, and neither Laura nor I dared to look forward to the dark and vague future we might be doomed to drag out in the world.

‘Their arrival filled my wife with shame and anger, and I do believe with generous sorrow for me. My quarter’s pittance was soon expended; *her* salary could not maintain us all. My tutor soon discovered the whole situation, and laid it mercilessly bare before my uncle, Sir John Dalton, who from that hour cast me off, ignored my letters and my existence, and disinherited me by his will.

‘I had no money, or means of getting any, after the best of my jewellery and wardrobe had departed. Laura’s father and mother soon proved abusive and most obnoxious to me; they insulted me hourly, and eventually drove me from the squalid lodgings we shared together. Laura one night took their part; it required but that to fill

up the measure of my disgust, and I found myself wandering in the streets with all I possessed in the world—the clothes that I wore. I rooted the love of her out of my heart; but it was long before I could efface her image, which often a fancied resemblance in another brought before me.

‘There are some men of whom it is said that they will not acknowledge their false steps even to their own hearts; but I am not one of them, and must acknowledge, dear Goring, that in sackcloth and ashes I have repented of mine.

‘My haughty uncle proving obdurate to the last degree, there was no hope for me so far as he was concerned; so I took the Queen’s shilling and sailed for India, and there I strove to forget my boyish folly, the contemptible position I had occupied with such a father and mother-in-law, the disgust and horror with which their advent and their surroundings inspired me—sick, too, of the slatternly girl I had married,

for slatternly she too was in her home and when off the stage, reserving all her toilettes and her graces for the British public.

‘You know the rest. I soon got a commission through the ranks—sooner than I could have got it through the medium of a crammer and exams. From the hour I turned at midnight along the Marina of Hastings, and heard the monotonous sound of the surge, as it rolled on the beach in the dark, I have never heard of my wife or been able to trace her. Her odious parents I discovered have been long since dead, and that she is no longer on the stage, or, if so, bears another name, or has gone I know not where.

‘I have sometimes hoped that I had been freed from her by death—ungenerous though that hope may be, and that my uncle must have heard of her demise, when by a codicil to his will he left me all his fortune. And now you know why it was that I dared not make a proposal to Mrs. Trelawney—

nor did I ever think of love or marriage till I met her lately ; and how I love her, and have struggled to tear that hopeless passion from my heart, is known only to God and to myself !'

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

‘**P**OOOR Dalton!’ you have indeed suffered deeply—paid dear for your boyish folly,’ said Goring, as the former concluded the little story of his early life in a voice tremulous with emotion. ‘Now the apparent inconsistency of your attention to Mrs. Trelawney is quite accounted for.’

‘Until I knew myself free to ask her to be my wife I had sworn in my inner heart that I would not do so—indeed, I dared not do so; yet, for the life of me, attracted as I was, I could not help hovering about her; but now I am going to Ashanti, and there is an end of it! Such was the end of the fatal passion of a foolish lad. Since

those days I have never entered a theatre, and shudder at the mere idea of a dramatic situation.'

'You are in one now,' said a sweet and tremulous voice, as Mrs. Trelawney, who, unseen and unheard by them in their pre-occupation, had softly entered the room, stood before them.

How much or how little she had overheard they did not precisely know, but with a smile of mingled sadness and sweetness, pride and triumph, she threw up her veil, and the full light of the gasalier overhead fell upon her rich, shining hair, her beautiful and animated countenance.

'Mrs. Trelawney!' exclaimed the friends together, as they started from their chairs.

'You here—in Southampton!' added Dalton, in a voice tremulous with bewilderment.

'Yes. Can it be that you have yet to learn that I am that Laura Dorillion to whom you gave this opal and diamond ring,

with whom you spent so many a sweet hour, by Fairlight Glen, the East Cliffs that overhang the sea, by the Dripping Well, and amid the old castle walls at Hastings—the Laura whom you married, and from whom you so coldly fled?’

Dalton tried to speak, but his voice was gone; he could but stretch his hand towards her, without advancing, while regarding her with growing bewilderment; so she spoke again, with tears in her voice.

‘You ought to have forgiven me the humility of my origin, for that I could not help—ay, forgiven me long ago, Anthony. Remember that “he who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself,” for “every man hath need of forgiveness,” we are told.’

‘My wife—you?’ exclaimed Dalton.

‘Laura—your own wife, whom you married in St. Clement’s Church on the tenth of August. You remember the day?’

The words were simple, but spoken with

great pathos, and all her sparkling manner seemed to have left her as she seated herself, and he hung over her.

‘Do you forgive me, Laura, and pardon me—pardon me, and love me?’

‘You know that I love you.’

He was about to put an arm round her, when he paused, and said,

‘But whence this name of Trelawney?’

‘I assumed it from an aunt, who left me a small fortune, but for which I—I might have been compelled to struggle in penury on the stage to support your daughter.’

‘My daughter!’ exclaimed Dalton, a great love for the beautiful little girl he knew suddenly gushing up in his heart.

‘My daughter—mine?’

‘Our child,’ said Laura, softly.

‘Born—when?’

‘Six months after you left me at Hastings.’

‘But her name—of Antoinette?’

‘Is but the feminine of your own—Anthony.’

‘Oh, what a blind fool I have been—
Laura—Laura!’

Goring, who had been studying a picture on the wall, now thought he might as well withdraw softly, and smoke his cigar outside.

Taller in stature, fuller in figure, more fully developed in every way, and with a bearing, manner, and grace cultivated by those among whom she had moved, it required a certain effort to recognise in her the girlish Laura Dorillion of the past time. Though her whole style was different—finer and more statuesque—and the mode of her toilette and of dressing her hair was different, her voice and the inflections of it, her expression of eye, the droop of the lid and flicker of the long lash, and the sweet smile of her lip were, he now saw, all unchanged, and he pressed her to his breast in the rapture of the moment, forgetting that the transport which was soon to bear him away was at that supreme moment of joy having

her fires banked up preparatory to putting to sea.

‘And you love me, Laura?’ he never was tired of repeating, and hearing the sweet admission that she did so. ‘Oh, why have you concealed all this—why have you concealed yourself thus, and from me?’

‘I wished to try you—to test you—to compel you to love me, and I have done so, have I not?’ she asked, taking his face between her hands and gazing tenderly into his eyes.

‘You know now what fettered my tongue,’ said he, with a sigh.

‘I knew you were in bondage—but it was in bondage to *me*. Your love for me was an insult to myself; your compliments and intentions in the present time, were an implied insult to my past. You dared to love me, knowing that you had a wife somewhere—where, you knew not; but you little thought that Mrs. Trelawney, the supposed widow of a mythical Trelawney, and

Laura Dorillion were one and the same person. Now, is the situation dramatic? Do you remember that you told me that you loved me against your own will and conscience, and that my very *name* of Laura repressed that love at times? Heavens, could you but know what I felt—how my heart was wrung—my woman's pride alternately roused and crushed by admissions such as these! I have suffered greatly, darling, but all is over now,' she added, laying her cheek on his breast, while his lips were pressed to her forehead.

After a time, she spoke again.

'I knew not that you were in the Army, or were in life. I knew not of your existence till I met you suddenly at Aldershot, after I had lived years of seclusion in the Channel Isles. I thanked God for the discovery; I vowed to win you again, if I could, before I would reveal myself—and I have done so.'

She whose love he had so longed and

prayed for, and yet striven to root out of his heart, was now his own—his own after all; and all the pent-up love of lonely years had found reward at last.

‘Often before I met you again—discovered you, and vowed to make you mine again, I had pondered that, but for Netty’s sake, whether, taking it all in all, the good with the bad, life was worth living,’ said she, her eyes full of tears now.

‘And till now, Laura, my life has seemed a gloomy and empty one. I was often appalled by the aimlessness and isolation of it.’

‘How strange it is that you never discovered me!’ said Laura; ‘yet I have seen your eyes wander more than once to this engagement ring.’

‘And stranger still that when I heard you sing the old, old song that was once so familiar, making my heart thrill with troubled memories, no light came to me. Oh, Laura, you acted well your part to this joyous ending.’

‘I told you that I had found the verses in an old album, where a friend wrote them years ago; that friend was yourself. You remember so lately telling me that I had ruined your life?’

‘Yes, Laura, and your cruel smile.’

‘God knows how at that moment I longed to cast myself on your breast, Anthony, as I do now, and barter all my past wrongs for a single kiss!’

His Christian name again on her lips, as in the days of their boy and girl love, ere the black change came, and how strange, yet familiar—how sweet, how dear it sounded!

‘How did you learn I was here with Goring?’ he asked, tenderly.

‘I learned it at the transport.’

‘My darling—my darling, why have you kept all this secret so long—the secret that you were my own?’

‘As I told you, I would never be more to you *than I am now*, were I to live a hundred years, and was I not right?’

‘But to keep the secret so long—I might

never have learned it, for to-morrow will see us separated. Hastings was the first volume of our romance.'

'Southampton was the second.'

'The third is Ashanti. How it will end, God alone knows, darling,' he added, straining her in his embrace, while her tears fell fast now; 'if spared to return to you, Laura—to you and little Netty—you will never regret your love and trust in me at last—your confidence in my affection.'

Poor Dalton—'if spared;' he was right to say that, with the fate and fortune of a barbarous war before him.

The old love had become the new one, and the new love was the old; and yet it seemed that to-night both had entered on a new relationship.

And, as we have said, the two last appeals of Jerry Wilmot and Dalton ended differently. Practically they came to the same conclusion—a separation from those they loved.

Laura now deplored deeply her pride and folly, as she deemed it, in playing the game she had done so long; but the separation had to be faced and endured; yet she watched the transport, as it steamed down Southampton water, till it melted into the haze; and it was not until then that she fully realised that her husband, so lately restored to her, was gone again, and perhaps for ever.

But that her appearance on board would have excited speculation in the battalion, she would have gone down the Channel with the steamer and come ashore in the pilot's boat at Deal.

On the long, though rapid voyage, Dalton had ample food for reflection, for thinking of the strangeness of his fate, that for months past he had been associating with, meeting and seeing at intervals, and loving deeply, a woman who was his own wife, and yet he knew it not!

Why had she played this perilous game so long?

Why, but for the temptation to win him again, and for the gratification of a kind of affectionate vengeance. And now they were separated, each with but a memory to the other again.

A few photos and two locks of hair—the light blond hair of his wife, a golden curl of his little daughter—were all that poor Dalton took with him to the burning coast of Ashanti, to remind him of the happiness he had so lately and so briefly tasted, and might never taste more.

CHAPTER XII.

BEVIL GORING'S RESOLUTION.

IN his bitter anxiety Bevil Goring descended again to apply to Mr. Solomon Slagg as to the movements of Lord Cadbury; but ignorant perhaps of the peer's actual whereabouts, and that the applicant was now the possessor of twenty thousand per annum, he never vouchsafed the slightest reply.

Alison had promised to wait for him a year—and well he knew that, if left to herself, she would have waited for several. Would she be true to that promise? Could he but find her now, he would have no compunction in carrying her off, whatever her father might say, though it would seem

that the brave old Scottish days of Lochinvar and Jock of Hazeldean are over and for ever.

The corps was gone now, and he felt dull and lonely with the *dépôt*, which would probably soon be taken from the camp to Chatham or elsewhere, and the little duty he had of it consisted chiefly of drilling and training green hands, and taking them through a weary course of musketry, while his thoughts were elsewhere, and he soon began to feel that, if he did not soon learn tidings of Alison, he would 'leave no stone unturned' to get away from Aldershot—to get away to fight the Ashantees or any other folks; and the next moment he would be thankful that he was left behind to search for her.

To search for her—but where?

Ay, where? He was soon to receive a terrible rouser!

One day he visited Mrs. Trelawney to inform her that the transport with Dalton

and the regiment on board had been spoken with by a vessel some sixty miles westward of Ushant, when he found her in the act of writing a note to himself, and looking somewhat nervous and disturbed in manner.

She received him with unusual kindness, and with a kind of sympathy in her manner that puzzled him.

After a little pause, while eyeing him closely, she said,

‘You have seen this morning’s paper, I presume?’

‘Yes,’ said he, and his heart seemed to flutter, as it was evident that she had seen something therein that he had not.

‘Did you not see the announcement of——’

‘Of what?’ he asked, impetuously, as Mrs. Trelawney paused, her lips apparently unable to tell to what she referred, and with tremulous hands she took up a morning paper and searched for a particular paragraph or passage, while Goring felt his

heart sickening, as he never doubted it referred to the marriage of Alison, who, he feared, had yielded to her father's iron influence at last.

'Read this—but nerve yourself first, my dear friend,' said Mrs. Trelawney, in her sweet low voice.

'It is confidently asserted that the English yacht reported as having been sunk some weeks ago in a midnight collision with the lugger *Le Chien Noir*, of Ostend, off the mouth of the Maese, is Lord Cadbury's beautiful brigantine the *Firefly*, so well known at the Cowes Regattas. Sir Ranald Cheyne of Essilmont and suite were on board.'

He grew deadly pale and reeled, but, recovering, read the fatal paragraph again and again, till the letters seemed photographed on his brain, and he was scarcely conscious. Mrs. Dalton, as we must call her now, was in tears, and had taken his left hand caressingly between her own.

'Shocked as I am by this news, which I trust in heaven may be untrue, I am shocked,' said she, 'to be first to break it to you; but you must have learned it in time, and perhaps even more abruptly, and from those less able to sympathise with you.'

He covered his eyes and did not speak.

'You observed,' said Laura, 'that the writer says it is *reported*—which leaves room for hope—and we were told that the yacht had gone to the Mediterranean.'

'Which I began to suspect was a ruse, and this awful intelligence seems to prove that I was right,' said Goring, in a very broken voice. 'My poor Alison—my poor Alison.'

He threw himself into a chair, and a silence for some minutes ensued.

Separation and opposition were to be looked forward to, and had been encountered and effected. Even a marriage with Lord Cadbury was not improbable; had

not his own heart told him so but a few minutes before? But a catastrophe like this—death—death by drowning—was altogether unlooked for!

Sad and broken was the conversation now between him and Laura Dalton, and they could but surmise and conjecture in vain, while he lingered long with her, as he clung to her presence and society for sympathy.

Drowned—gone—out of the world—away from him, and for ever! It seemed incredible, unrealisable!

He recalled more powerfully than ever now her loving words, her tender and winning expression of eye; again he felt in memory the pressure of her soft little hand, her gentle kisses, and the sea seemed to give up its dead at the only exorcism it will obey—that of a bereaved and faithful heart—and his beloved was with him as on that last time he saw her face.

‘Drowned—lost!’ he struck his hands

together, and often passed one across his eyes, as if to clear away a mist before him.

And he thought—he could think of nothing else—of her delicate and beloved form being the sport of the cold, dark waves—it might be the prey of the dwellers therein—that awful grave, without turf or flowers, which no sunshine would ever brighten to his eyes—the cruel sea that had taken her from him for ever !

Times there were when but for this feature in his loss he might have thanked Heaven that it was death—only death—that separated him from his darling, and not a degrading marriage with that odious old man. And in the extremity of his grief he at times forgot to feel anger at either him or her father for the catastrophe they were the unintentional means of bringing about.

But anger and rage too were coming soon.

When Goring was sitting like a man

turned to stone, evincing little sign of life save when he sighed heavily, Laura Dalton kindly laid a hand on his shoulder and said,

‘The dépôt is fully formed and in working order now. Leave the command of it to the next officer, young Fleming, and, as you will not be wanted at Aldershot till the spring drills commence, go personally and search for intelligence.’

‘Search—where—at the bottom of the sea?’ said Goring, huskily.

‘The yacht is said to have been sunk off the Maese; people at Maesland-Sluis or Rotterdam may know something about it. Get leave, go there and inquire, you will be useless here, my dear Goring, and a burden to yourself.’

‘Right, I thank you,’ he exclaimed, starting up; ‘it is a good suggestion.’

‘Is not anything better than sitting still a prey to wretchedness and one’s miserable thoughts?’ she said, feelingly, as she refer-

red, perhaps, to some time or passages in her own past life.

Goring resolved to take measures for trying his too probably useless and hopeless search at once. He promised faithfully to write to Laura Dalton informing her of his progress, and of every fragment of intelligence he could pick up—telegraphing to her in the first place. He pressed her hand, kissed her on the forehead, and in another minute was in his saddle, and galloping back to Aldershot at a break-neck speed—at a rate which would certainly have made his nag remonstrate had it possessed the gift of speech.

He had wealth enough certainly to satisfy all the requirements—the wishes of Sir Ranald Cheyne; but what did it avail him now? It would neither restore the dead nor his own peace of mind. And now he could but do, as he had done a hundred times before, softly open the clasp of her engagement ring—her brother Ellon's ring

—and gaze upon her features, and the tiny lock of hair, while his heart was wrung within him.

He dashed off his application for leave, and had it at once despatched. He commanded the inlying piquet that night, and, like an automaton, had to go through the formula of parading it in line with forage caps, great-coats, and side arms, and seeing the camp patrolled between retreat and half an hour after the first post of tattoo.

Never would he forget the gloom of that few hours' duty, which seemed to be done, not by himself, but some one else. He had a curious and perplexing sense of a dual existence.

Would leave be refused him? That was not to be thought of.

He could not rest in his hut alone. Nearly all that night he wandered about the silent camp like an evil or unquiet spirit, challenged again and again by great-coated sentinels, who marvelled whether this officer

who passed their posts so often, and to all appearance so aimlessly, was demented or not; and so, for hours and hours of a gloomy and inclement night, he roved about, and heard the wind swaying the tops of the trees. He shivered, and tried to collect his thoughts, but seemed to have none to collect.

He tried to reason with himself, but, whatever idea suggested itself, one was always uppermost—Alison drowned, Alison in the cruel and merciless sea.

‘I must get out of this place, do something, pull myself together, or I shall go mad,’ he muttered.

Was he dreaming? was all this sorrow a vision of the night that would pass away?

Till the morning gun boomed from Gun Hill, and the sweet low *réveille* began to steal out on the moistened air, he continued to wander thus, till, drenched with the dews of night, he retired to his hut, and flinging himself upon his bed, endeavoured to sleep

for an hour or two—the sleep of utter exhaustion.

From this happy state he was soon roused by an uproarious rattling at the door of his room, and his subaltern, Frank Fleming, in undress uniform—a heedless, noisy young fellow, and a second edition of Jerry Wilmot, but neither revised nor corrected—came bustling in, shouting,

‘The black ball is hoisted *alone* at headquarters. Thank God!’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Goring, in a weak voice, but angrily.

‘Mean, man alive! don’t you know? It means that the parade is cancelled.’

‘I had forgotten, but, till I dismiss the piquet, parades are nothing to me,’ said Goring, turning his face to the wall, and Fleming departed, fully believing from the manner and appearance of his senior officer that ‘he was screwed tight as a drum, by Jove!—on duty, too! I wonder the fellow doesn’t cut Aldershot now—he’s rich

enough ; can draw cheques galore ; not get them, like me, with strong paternal comments, and perhaps well-deserved objurgations.'

And Bevil Goring lay there in his hut, hearing the incessant drums beating and bugles sounding with a dazed feeling, as if he had been shot into another world. With him it was—

‘ Oh, love for a year, a month, a day,
But alas for the love that loves alway !’

‘ What the devil is up with Goring ?’ said Fleming and others of the *dépôt* ; ‘ within the last few days he has looked older by ten years—worn and worried—not at all like a man who has just come into a fine pot of money.’

CHAPTER XIII.

THE JOURNEY.

AT last he got his leave of absence and was off for London. Food remained before him almost untasted or forgotten. He ate eventually, but very sparingly, like one who knows it should be partaken of only for strength to achieve some task that was to come.

‘We no longer travel,’ wrote Thackeray, with reference to some of the improvements of the age; ‘we are carried from place to place,’ and Goring was sensible of what another writer calls ‘the tedious hurry of locomotion,’ as he was swept on his way to Harwich by the 7 p.m. train from the

great bustling and brilliantly lighted station at Liverpool Street.

There are few among us who have not undergone at some period of our lives that intolerable fever of spirit, when setting out on some journey or errand, the eventuality of which may be the life or death of some one loved well and dearly. The heart and soul annihilating space, traverse the journey in an instant ; the helpless longing body, no matter at how swift a rate it may be progressing, seems to stand stock-still, and the imposed inaction becomes a physical torture that is to a certain extent merciful, since for the time it partially paralyses the action of the brain.

All this, or something like it, was endured by Bevil Goring, while the swift express tidal train sped on its way through the darkness of the night by Witham with its long and almost solitary street ; through Colchester, getting but a glimpse of the winding valley overlooked by its old castle ;

by Manningtree, Bradfield, and welcome to his ears was the cry of 'Harwich,' and he became sensible of the cold sea-breeze as the train went clanking into the station, on the tongue of land between the mouths of the Stour and the Orwell; and a minute more saw him with his railway-rugs in a strap hurrying after the porter who shouldered his portmanteau.

'What steamer, sir?' he asked.

'Rotterdam.'

'All right, sir—here you are.'

A vision of a red funnel amid the uncertain glow of many coloured lights and lanterns, a bustle and the jarring of ropes and chains, with the clank of donkey-engines and goods swung in mid-air from derricks, ascending and descending, much shouting and swearing and hurrying to and fro over slippery decks and piles of luggage covered by wet tarpaulins, a bearded man on the gangway, lantern in hand, viewing the tickets and passing the travellers on board;

and then with a sigh of relief—almost satisfaction—Goring found himself in the cabin of the steamer.

‘State room or locker, sir?’ asked the steward, touching his cap.

‘A locker—there, that will do,’ said Goring, as he threw his rugs on one and looked round him. He saw ‘Rotterdam’ on everything, from the front of the steward’s cap to the glasses in the trays that swung between the beams, and after a brandy and seltzer he lit a cigar and went on deck as the screw began to revolve, the shore-warps fell plashing from the timber heads into the water, and way was made upon the vessel.

There were but few passengers on board, and these few, as yet, seemed disposed to be surly, suspicious, and to keep apart from each other in true John Bull fashion.

A bright and beautiful moon shed its silvery light upon the smooth but rippling water, and by half-past nine the clang of the Bell Buoy began to grow fainter and

fainter as the steamer headed seaward, and the many red and green lights on the flat shore began to fade out and melt into the uncertain haze.

Long did Bevil Goring remain on deck alone, sunk in deep and sad thoughts.

Was *she* indeed beneath those moonlit waves over which he was so swiftly gliding. He shivered as he looked at them, and turned his eyes to the star-studded sky; at last he wearied of the incessant repetitions from the watch to the man at the wheel, 'starboard,' 'port,' 'hard-a-port,' 'steady,' every ten minutes or so when a vessel came near, and the tiresome iteration of their orders only ceased when the fog-horns began to sound, when the anchor was let go near a long line of lights that twinkled dimly through mist upon the shore to the eastward, and Bevil Goring knew that he was now close in on the Continent.

Midnight was long since past, and he went below; the weary steward was still

yawning in his pantry, when Bevil thought another brandy and seltzer would do him no harm.

‘How long may we be here?’ he asked, impatiently.

‘Till the fog lifts, sir, or day breaks, certainly.’

‘Then we may not get to Rotterdam till midday?’

‘Rotterdam, did you say, sir?’ asked the steward, with a stare of surprise.

‘Yes.’

‘Why, sir, this is the Antwerp boat, and these lights on shore are Flushing—we’re in the Scheldt.’

Goring was exasperated on hearing this—a cause of delay and trouble quite unexpected.

‘I was told distinctly that this was the Rotterdam boat.’

‘So it is, sir, in a way—it is *the* Rotterdam, bound for Antwerp. Where *was* you going to?’

Goring explained, on which the steward mixed himself a glass of grog, laughed, and said it was a jolly mistake. Goring, however, failed to see the jollity of it, and began to consult a railway guide to trace out his route from Antwerp the moment he landed there, by Breda, to the city on the Maese.

While thus employed, he asked the steward if he had heard of a collision some time ago near the mouth of that river, in which an English yacht had suffered.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the steward, ‘but it wasn’t quite off the mouth of the Maese.’

‘Where, then?’

‘More to the south’ard—somewhere off the coast of Walchern.’

‘It was Lord Cadbury’s yacht.’

‘Yes, sir, so I heard.’

‘What happened?’ asked Goring, making an effort to control himself and conceal his agitation, which was totally unperceived by the steward, who was collecting from the

table all the glasses and decanters left by the passengers, who were now rolled up in rugs, and stowed away in their berths or on lockers.

‘ One of the craft was sunk.’

‘ Which?’

‘ Don’t know, sir, precisely.’

‘ Were any drowned?’

‘ Some o’ course, sir—a young woman, for one.’

‘ A young lady?’ gasped Bevil.

‘ Can’t say, sir—coming, sir!’ he added, in reply to a voice that hailed from near the rudder-case; ‘ whisky grogs for two—flash o’ lightning and gin cock-tail for the two American gents,’ he added to his assistant; while Goring betook himself to the little cuddy on deck, and sat there with a very benumbed and stunned feeling about him; while once more the vibration of the vessel and the everlasting ‘Hard-a-port—Starboard—steady’ announced that the steamer was again under way; that the fog

had lifted ; and that she was gliding up the waters of the Scheldt, on each side of which not a vestige of the flat shore was visible as yet.

All inclination to sleep had departed from Bevil Goring ; yet he was very weary, and a year seemed to have elapsed since he threw off his uniform and donned mufti at Aldershot, and had seen the green and red lights of Harwich Pier fade into the sea.

Trees that seemed to grow amid the water, fringes of low willow-clad banks, distant spires and windmills began to peep up on either hand in the grey light of the morning, and the earlier part of noon was creeping on, when, long before they were near the city of Antwerp, the spire of its glorious cathedral, one of the finest specimens of Gothic architecture in Europe, the carving of which is like Mechlin lace, and which Charles V. said was so delicate in its workmanship that it would require a case

to preserve it, seemed to start sheer from the surface of the water—a curious effect produced by the immensity of its height, which, as it towers skywards, dwarfs to toys the really lofty houses that cluster round it.

On past the green sloping glacis and grassy embrasures of the citadel—one of the strongest in Europe—glided the steamer. As she did so, Goring could little foresee a remarkable morning, an episode in his own life, he was to spend on the ramparts of that Belgian fortress. Nearer she drew to the shore, with its quaint houses of the Middle Ages, all crow-stepped gables and curious windows; nearer to the wharves, where lay piles of goods coming from or going to every part of the world; and now, dockmen, porters, hotel-touts, and wharfingers began to rush hurriedly to and fro, while gendarmes in blue, with rifle and sword, smoked their cigarettes, looking placidly on; and Bevil Goring did so as one in a dream.

A few minutes more, while the steam blew off with a roar, and the *Rotterdam* was moored alongside the great Quai Van Dyck. On one side lay the city, with all its vast wet docks; on the other the green, receding Tête de Flandres; between them a river, in size far exceeding the Thames at London; and far in the west the shadowy isles, with which the eye, from the spire, may see that the mouth of the Scheldt is crowded.

Barring all passage shoreward, at the end of the gangway, about which the passengers were crowding impatiently with their travelling-bags and portmanteaus, stood a *douanier*, or custom-house officer, in blue uniform, with the inevitable kepi (worn by every official in Antwerp, from the general commanding the garrison to the milk and but-terman), bearded, grim, impassive, and, like all Belgian under-functionaries, disposed to insolence, dilatoriness, and to annoy the traveller, thereby contrasting singularly with

the punctuality and politeness of similar officials in France and Austria.

Bevil Goring's baggage, a simple portmanteau, had been opened, examined, passed, and marked with the usual cabalistic figures in white chalk, and the steward, in expectation of a small fee, was re-strapping it, when he suddenly drew Bevil's attention to a remarkably beautiful little vessel, cutter-rigged aft and brig forward, with a breach in her bulwarks, on which a gang of riggers were setting up a new foretopmast and foretopgallant mast, with their hamper, cross-yards, and so forth. She lay alongside the quay, and just astern of the steamer.

Impatient only to get ashore and drive to the railway for Rotterdam, Bevil was about to hurry up the gangway, when the steward said,

‘*That's* the yacht as you were asking about, sir.’

‘Lord Cadbury's--the *Firefly!*’

‘Yes.’

‘Then she was not sunk?’

‘Sunk; no, she couldn’t have been, for there she lies, as the Flushing pilot has just told me. *She* sunk the lugger off the mouth of the Scheldt, and was towed up here to re-fit. And a regular beauty she is.’

Bevil Goring felt his heart leap, and, giddy with many emotions, forced his way rather unceremoniously up the gangway, and, with his portmanteau in one hand and his roll of railway-rugs in the other, leaped from the quay on the deck of the yacht.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SNARE.

A SMART, sailor-like fellow, wearing an Oxford jacket and naval cap, and who seemed to be in authority, as he was overlooking the riggers, who were swaying up and fidding the topmast, now turned and gave him a glance of inquiry, as much as to say, 'Now, who are *you*, and what do you want?'

'This is the *Firefly*, Lord Cadbury's yacht?'

'It is.'

'You had an accident at sea—a collision; did anything else happen, were any lives lost?' asked Goring, impetuously and nervously.

‘May I ask who is inquiring?’ said the other.

‘Captain Goring, of the Rifle Brigade.’

‘Oh, a friend of his lordship’s, I presume?’

‘No, though I have met him. And you?’

‘I am Tom Llanyard, at your service—his lordship’s skipper, but in Her Majesty’s service, like yourself, once. Lives were lost—some of the Ostend lubbers, who failed to hang out a light.’

‘Any of the yacht?’

‘Only Daisy Prune, Miss Cheyne’s maid. Poor little girl, I did my best to save her, but a wave took her out of my grasp.’

Human grief is perhaps rather selfish; thus it was rather a relief to Goring when he heard that the poor human life lost was that of ‘only Daisy Prune.’

‘Miss Cheyne?’

‘Is well, or was well when she left the yacht three weeks ago, but Sir Ranald was seriously injured by a swinging block. Step

below, Captain Goring, and have a glass of wine. You look fagged.'

'Thanks,' replied Goring, who was giddy again with the mere revulsion of feeling, and felt an emotion of great thankfulness that he had so suddenly, so unexpectedly lighted upon the direct track of those he was in search of. Hitherto he had only looked forward to tidings—if any—of death, not life, and it might be of unhappiness.

He stepped into the handsome little saloon of the yacht, which had all the luxury and elegance of a sea-going boudoir.

'Pemmican,' cried Llanyard to the steward, 'glasses, some dry sherry, and a biscuit; too early for grog, I suppose, sir, as the sun is not over the foreyard. *That* was Miss Cheyne's cabin,' he added, indicating a little state-room; the occupation of which by her gave it an interest in his eyes and still more in the eyes of his listener; 'yes, sir, her cabin, and may be again, if she sails with us.'

‘Ah!’ replied Goring, thinking it might be unwise to exhibit too much interest; ‘where is Lord Cadbury just now?’

‘They are all at a hotel in Antwerp.’

‘*All!*’

‘Yes—Lord Cadbury, Sir Ranald, and Miss Cheyne.’

‘What hotel?’

‘Don’t precisely know—I’m seldom on shore myself, and, when I do, never go beyond the Hôtel d’Angleterre on the quay, as I know neither French nor Flemish, and might get stranded. But Gaskins knows where they are, and he’s on board just now.’

‘Gaskins—who is he?’

‘His lordship’s groom and valet. Pemmican, pass the word forward for Gaskins—that is, if you want to know.’

‘I wish to know very much,’ said Goring, scarcely able to restrain his impatience.

Gaskins appeared, just as we saw him last, looking the perfection of an English

groom, with a short, dark-grey surtout buttoned to the throat, spotless white tie and cords, long-bodied and short-legged, a straw in his mouth, a flower at his button-hole, and a sudden twinkle of intense cunning in his half-closed eyes, as he recognised Bevil Goring (whom he had often seen out with the hounds), and at once took in the whole situation. He had not been so long in Lord Cadbury's service as not to know what brought *him* to Antwerp.

'This gentleman wishes to know Lord Cadbury's hotel,' said Tom Llanyard.

Gaskins touched his cockaded hat, and affected to think. He paused and scratched his chin.

'Can't you say?' said Goring, impatiently.

'He has changed it, sir, lately; we are now at the—the "Red Lion" in the "Roo de Cos," I think it is called.'

'We, meaning also Sir Ranald and Miss Cheyne?'

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Thanks. And now, Mr. Llanyard, I shall bid you good morning,’ and, shaking the sailor’s hand, Goring went on deck.

‘Here are your railway rugs, sir,’ said Gaskins, following him thither up the companion-way.

Goring took the handle of the straps in his hand, nodded his thanks, and went on shore; but had he looked back he might have been puzzled to perceive the extraordinary grin that overspread the visage of Mr. Gaskins, and the manner in which that gentleman slapped his thigh and then his mouth, making thereby the loud sound of drawing a cork.

He then whispered something in the ear of a gendarme who was standing on the quay. The latter looked over the voiture, or cab, into which Goring was stepping, and, after eyeing Gaskins keenly, made an entry in his note-book.

The latter then jumped into a tramway

'bus, which he knew passed the hotel patronised by Lord Cadbury, to whom he betook himself in all haste to report matters, and that Captain Goring was in Antwerp!

Was it fate, good fortune, or 'Cupid, king of gods and men,' that had led him so kindly, so fortunately, to blunder at Harwich, and get on board the wrong boat, which eventually proved the *right* one for him?

With his sense of exultation there was mingled a prayerful emotion of great thankfulness that Alison had escaped amid the horror of the catastrophe, and that she was, as Llanyard asserted, well.

To see her, to have speech with her, to carry her off, now that he could lay wealth at her feet, were the next things to achieve, and to that end it would never do to put up at the same hotel—that mentioned by Gaskins, the groom; and, truth to tell, he

would have had some difficulty in doing that. So he selected another—the Hôtel du Parc—the name of which he gave the driver of the voiture in which he was conveyed. Oh, how lightly and happily beat his heart as he went!—past buildings and streets, all demolished now or being so for the construction of those vast new docks, which will be the boast of Antwerp, and by the Rue Reynders, to the open and spacious Place Verte, where the graceful statue of Rubens in cavalier costume stands, and the north side of which is almost entirely formed by the towering masses of the glorious cathedral.

She was living—thank heaven!—living and well! was his incessant thought. He had no longer her loss—her death—to sorrow for; but he had her deliverance to achieve. To wait a year—no! there was no need for that now; and he felt as if she were his already.

But they had all been some time in Ant-

werp ; what if Cadbury's influence and her father's authority had prevailed, and—but—no ! He thrust *that* idea aside, and entered the dining-room of the Hôtel du Parc, while the waiter settled with the driver and took charge of his luggage.

‘What accommodation did monsieur want?’

‘Only a bed-room.’

‘For to-night only?’

‘No—for some days, weeks perhaps.’

‘Monsieur had come to see the churches, the galleries, the Musée Plantin, and all that?’

‘Precisely !’ exclaimed Goring, with impatience.

‘Luncheon, monsieur?’ suggested the garrulous waiter, and, to be partly rid of him and left to himself, Goring ordered it.

Many hotels overlooked the Place Verte ; was she in one of them ? Perhaps her eyes were at that same moment looking on what he saw there ; and the tall edifices with smokeless chimneys, the result of the

general use of stoves in houses, some old enough and quaint enough to have been seen by Charles V.; the little carts drawn by dogs; the little yellow police-vans proceeding to and from the Palais de Justice, escorted by soldier-looking gendarmes in blue tunics, with white braid and aiglettes, bear-skin caps, and carbines; women without caps, or with queer poke bonnets and long dark cloaks; the funeral of a 'Liberal' going past—the hearse without cross, candles, or priests, and preceded by a great brass band playing polkas and mazurkas; the Calvarys and Madonnas at the street corners, or in the porte-cochère of houses, all with lamps before them; municipal guards with plumed hats; artisans in blouses and sabots; shabby ill set up soldiers of all sorts and sizes, in baggy trousers, queer forage caps, and enormous red worsted shoulder knots—soldiers between whose appearance and that of 'our fellows,' Goring drew comparisons not very

favourable to the former; priests in shovel hats and long floating cloaks or soutanes, one perhaps preceded by a cross-bearer and acolyte with a bell, bearing the Blessed Sacrament to the dying.

High overhead the sweet carillons or musical bells, so common to all the churches in Belgium, were playing merrily in the cathedral spire, from whence, ever and anon announcing the hours and half hours, came the sonorous booms of that vast bell at the baptism of which Charles V. stood as 'god-father,' and which requires the united strength of sixteen men to pull it.

For the first time during a past period Bevil Goring had an appetite, and was well disposed to do justice to the *cuisine* of the Hôtel du Parc—and, truth to tell, the Belgian cookery is second to none in the world; and after having *pâté de foie gras*, and dainty cutlets of veal, richly egg and bread crumbed to perfection, with pastry from Meurice's in the Marché aux Œufs,

without which no meal seems perfect in Antwerp, and a glass or two of Chablis, he thought he might as well ask a question or two of the garrulous waiter, who was hovering about, with a white towel over his left shoulder, his thick short hair oiled, and his moustache waxed and pointed *à la empereur*.

‘What is your name?’

‘Jacquot, monsieur,’ he replied, adopting the first position in dancing, smiling suavely, and pressing his hands together, or working them, as Dickens says, ‘with invisible soap in imperceptible water.’

‘In what part of Antwerp is the Rue d’Ecosse—is it near the Place Verte?’

‘Rue d’Ecosse, monsieur—there is no such street in Antwerp.’

‘Think again, Jacquot, please. I want the Hôtel Lion Rouge, Rue d’Ecosse.’

‘I assure you, monsieur, that there is no such street and no such hotel,’ replied Jacquot, emphatically.

‘I am not mistaken,’ thought Goring. ‘Can that rascally groom, in the interests of his master, have been deceiving me?’

As he had no reason for doubting that the waiter was correct in his statistics, he felt doubt and anger rise in his heart at the anticipation of trouble and difficulty; for if this fellow Gaskins had recognised and deceived him he would at once sound an alarm.

‘Have you heard of an English milord in Antwerp called Milord Cadbury?’

‘No, monsieur. There are many hotels; he may be in one.’

‘Have you a visitors’ list in Antwerp?’

‘No, monsieur; but here is the Brussels English newspaper, which may contain what monsieur wants.’

It was and is a weekly periodical, which gives the names of all visitors to the Belgian capital and its adjacent cities and towns, and after a brief search Goring found the names of ‘Lord Cadbury, Sir

Ranald Cheyne, and Miss Cheyne,' as being located at the Hôtel St. Antoine.

'Where is that hotel?'

'Close by, monsieur—at the corner of the Place, adjoining the Marché aux Souliers.'

'Thanks, Jacquot,' replied Goring, who began to breathe more freely. 'Now to consider what my plans must be,' he thought. 'I must not be rash, but I must act on the instant, as it is quite on the cards that Cadbury may shift their tents to Brussels or elsewhere.'

He twisted his moustache and almost ground his teeth at that idea:

'*If* he does,' thought he, 'and I can ever lay hands on him, I will parade him at daybreak—by heavens I will!—with an officer from the nearest barracks as my second. There is no explicit law against duelling here as at home, so, my Lord Cadbury, I may make your little game a dear one for you in the end. Now, however, to

write to Laura Dalton, or shall I telegraph?’

Jacquot, who had left the room for a minute, now came in with some perturbation in his face and manner.

‘An officer of gendarmes wishes to see you, monsieur, immediately, and has given an order to seize your luggage.’

‘To see me—to seize my luggage! What the devil does the fellow mean?’ exclaimed Goring, who was prompt enough to ire, as he started up from the table on seeing an officer of gendarmes, with his sword at his side, without salute or moving his cap, bluntly enter the room, while giving an order to some others who were outside.

We have said that Bevil Goring had promised to write to Laura Dalton reporting what discoveries he made of the fate of Alison.

But day followed day at Chilcote Grange after his departure, and neither letter nor telegram came from him; and Laura,

who was really full of anxiety and concern for both amid her own personal causes for serious thought, began to think that he too had disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HÔTEL ST. ANTOINE.

AT the very time that Bevil Goring, unconscious of mischief being worked against him, was discussing his cutlets and Chablis at the Hôtel du Parc, Mr. Gaskins was having an interview with his master, Lord Cadbury, at the adjacent Hôtel St. Antoine.

‘Captain Goring in Antwerp!’ exclaimed the latter. ‘How the devil has he discovered that we are here, for that circumstance alone can have brought him at a season when no one travels, and I have sedulously kept my name out of the London papers.’

‘It is the greatest lark out!’ said Gaskins,

bursting for the third time into an explosion of laughter.

‘What is the greatest lark—what *do* you mean, Gaskins?’ asked the peer, with some asperity, while staring at his dependent.

‘You remember the arrest of one of these Belgian rigger fellows, who were repairing the yacht, as a Liberal communist, or something of that kind, my lord?’

‘Perfectly well.’

‘He threw into a locker of the cabin some printed revolutionary manifestoes, which were found yesterday by Captain Llanyard, who meant to destroy them, so as to have no bother about the matter; but I slipped them into the railway rugs of that ere Captain Goring, gave the straight tip to a *jang-darum*, and I have no doubt that before night he will be arrested.’

Cadbury actually joined in the explosion of merriment with which his valet concluded this revelation of rascality.

‘Egad, you are a genius, Gaskins,’

said he; 'but did Llanyard see you do this?'

'No, my lord.'

'Or anyone else?'

'No, I took jolly good care of that.'

'On this charge he will be kept close till we can clear out of Antwerp by sea if the yacht is ready in time, or to Brussels, if only Sir Ranald would get well. But you spoke to a gendarme, you say.'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Your evidence will be wanted—perhaps you did not think of that?'

Gaskins' nether jaw dropped at this suggestion.

'These Belgian and French police are the devils to have anything to do with!' said his master; 'and *my* name must not be mixed up with this affair.'

'Of course not, my lord,' said Gaskins, with a cough.

'Put off your livery at once, change your clothes, and take an early train to Brussels.'

Keep out of the way till I send for you— and write to me your whereabouts.'

And, highly tickled by the whole affair, he gave a handful of money to Gaskins for his expenses.

'Thank you, my lord, I am off like a bird,' said that worthy, and he departed singing the music hall ditty, 'Love is like a cup of tea.'

'By Jove! Captain Goring won't find it so!—

"Lovely woman is the sugar;
Spoons we poor men often be—"

'*La-la-de-da!* Miss Cheyne,' and, chuckling over the mischief he thought he had put in motion, Mr. Gaskins took his departure from the Hôtel St. Antoine in a cab for the station of *Chemin de fer de l'Etat*, near the Zoological Gardens.

Cadbury's jealousy was roused again; he was most thoroughly enraged by the idea of Goring being at Antwerp when he was beginning to think he had Alison almost as

much to himself as she had been when in the yacht ; and yet he did not see much of her, as she was so constantly in attendance upon the sick-bed of her father.

Cadbury's fancy for her was a peculiar one. It was not love, we have before said ; not that his day for what he thought that sentiment to be, was past, 'because,' as a writer says, 'till the grave has closed over him, it is impossible to say of any man that his day for that, or its *fac-simile*, infatuation, is finished.'

All his life he had been engaged in *affaires du cœur*—affairs more or less coarse ; but never before had he found a girl of such refinement, beauty, and character as Alison Cheyne thrown by the mere force of circumstances almost on his mercy ; and now, after all the trouble he had taken, the expense of taking up the bills collected by Solomon Slagg, her aversion and resistance piqued and perhaps exasperated him, and he longed for the time when he should feel

that he triumphed over and humbled her, he cared little how.

‘How long—oh, Lord!--how long is this life of weariness and anxiety to last and be endured?’

It was Alison who said this, in a whisper to herself, as she sat in the half-lighted room, in which her father lay a-bed, ill, and sick, and faint, his head still suffering from the blow he had received on the night of the collision—a blow that nearly gave him concussion of the brain, and might yet prove serious at his years, and with his now broken constitution.

He lay in the plain but not unluxurious bed-room of a Belgian hotel—the St. Antoine. The walls were lofty, papered with sage-green paper; the bare and uncarpeted oak floor was varnished and polished like the face of a mirror; a cheerful fire was in the square black iron stove that stood in front of the carved oak mantelpiece, where-

on was an elegant French clock, above which rose a lofty mirror, and on each side of which were large vases full of flowers, arranged by the hands of Alison—chiefly roses, which at that season are brought all the way from Nice to Antwerp—by railway, of course.

She heard the carillons sounding pleasantly in the evening air high overhead apparently, and ever and anon the horns and bells of the passing tramway-cars as they glided through the Place Verte.

Among the decorations of the bed-chamber hung a large engraving of an English hunting scene, with the dogs in full cry scampering over fences and ditches, and her eyes often wandered towards it, as, in her mind, it was associated with the last day she had been out with the Royal Buckhounds, and rode from the green lane home to Chilcote Beeches accompanied by Bevil Goring. And then from the picture she would turn to watch her father's pale and sleeping face.

The grim visitant had more than once seemed nigh ; but Sir Ranald Cheyne clung persistently to earth and earthly things.

Alison sat close to his bedside, for he who lay there seemed—save some one far away, she thought—all that she had to cling to ; she was in a circle of light shed by a lamp upon a pedestal, and an unread Tauchnitz volume lay on her lap forgotten—‘Tales of Flemish Life,’ by Hendrik Conscience, the Walter Scott of Flanders.

She looked pale, worn, and wan. Sorrow and trouble were beginning to tell upon her now ; wakeful nights, restless days, and incessant anxious thoughts were all robbing her of the bloom of perfect youth ; the sweetness of lip, the softness of brow, the light of eye, were all passing away, and even her voice was changing, and becoming starved and thin, if we may use the expression. While in the yacht she had escaped her father’s peevishness to some extent, and the misery of her home life in

another, with its struggle for appearances and bare existence, its saving and scraping, and the duns of ever urgent creditors; but then she had undergone the grief of a rough separation from Bevil, with the annoyance the presence of Lord Cadbury gave her.

‘If I can only get through all this, nurse papa well, and get back to Bevil, or to where I can hear of him, how happy—how thankful I shall be!’

Though absent in body, she was ever present in spirit with Bevil; but how little could she conceive that he was at that very time so near her.

One of those horrible bats peculiar to Antwerp, and which begin to flit about as evening falls, came bang against the panes of the lighted window and woke Sir Ranald.

‘Still sitting there, bird Ailie,’ said he, ‘and not reading; of what are you thinking?’

‘Of home.’

‘What home—Chilcote or Essilmont?—of course you prefer the former now?’

‘Well, I do not care particularly for Chilcote; in my mind it is associated with gloom and struggles; I had nothing on earth to leave there but the fowls, the birds I spread crumbs for, the apple-trees and the flowers, and some little trifles, sketches, books, and nick-nacks that had become familiarly dear to me.’

But she did refer to the first and piercing thought of her life—Bevil Goring.

‘Poor Alison!’ said her father, as she kissed his brow and arranged his pillows, ‘your little hands have quite enough to do for me.’

‘They are diminutive members, perhaps, papa, but useful, anyway,’ she replied, with a faint smile.

‘Here in Antwerp there are many things you should see, poor child—the churches, galleries, museums, the Steyne. Cadbury suggests I should get a nursing sister. This is dull work for you, darling, and you must go out.’

‘I could not bear to see another nursing you. It is not the custom here for young girls to go out alone, and I have no companion, no escort—not even poor little Daisy Prune now.’

‘Why, there is Cadbury.’

She shivered at the name, and a gesture of impatience and anger escaped her. Well used as she had grown, in the affection of her heart, to subdue all emotions in the presence of her ailing father, to whom she had devoted herself, it was not in human nature but to feel wroth at the trickery to which she had been subjected, which had caused Daisy Prune to lose her life, and by which they might all have perished.

Her father had never ceased to urge Cadbury’s suit upon her in the intervals of his strength, and as in the affectionate heart of Alison there was a painful struggle between contempt and pity, sorrow and fear—contempt for his selfishness and avarice, pity for his fallen pride, sorrow for his

condition, and a great fear of her own future, for if he should die there she would be utterly alone in the world—alone and penniless in Antwerp!

Once she had thought he was nearly gone, especially on the first night he had been conveyed to the hotel from the shattered yacht at the Quai Van Dyck; but thanks to her care, more perhaps than even the skill of a Belgian doctor, he had drifted slowly but surely back from the confines of the spirit world to consciousness and what was comparative strength.

And when the latter came he at once took up the weary and querulous *rôle* of which the poor girl was so sick at heart.

She was never weary of pondering over the strange fact that the name of the vessel by which they had so nearly perished was the *Black Hound*, of Ostend—the dog of the family tradition. It was certainly, to say the least of it, a strange coincidence, and many an instance of its alleged appear-

ance in time of woe occurred to her as she sat brooding there.

Among others when an uncle of hers—a younger brother of Sir Ranald—had gone fishing up the Ythan at Ellon, and days passed on without his returning. A search was made, and Archie Auchindoir saw a black hound stealthily drinking at a pool in the river, from which on his approach it disappeared into a pine thicket, and soon after he saw at the very spot where it had been drinking the pallid face of her drowned uncle appear, as his body came to the surface. This uncle had always been fond of gazing into the water, either still or running, and had often been heard to declare that this pool—a famous salmon one—had a strong fascination for him; and there he came—none knew how—to his end.

And now, as she thought of these things, the girl's memory wandered fondly away to the pleasant days of her childhood at Essil-mont, where there were no high walls or

great houses, as here at Antwerp, to shut out the pure air and bright sunshine of God, but where all was so open and free; and so, in fancy, she was again there, amid the white snows of winter, when the Ythan was frozen between its banks; the trees were covered with glittering crystalline hoar frost, and the braes were shrouded with snow; when the primroses and violets of spring peeped up under the budding timber; when the forests were leafy in summer; the fox-glove blazed ruddy amid the green underwood, and when there was a glow equal to dawn through all the short June nights in the glorious north; and in autumn, when the golden corn waved on the upland slopes, and beautiful were the fern and heath that covered the bonnie, bonnie braes she might never look upon again, and the tears of a great tenderness and love of her old Scottish home welled up in her eyes at the thought; but she dried them in haste as she became aware that her

father was speaking to her again, and upon the old obnoxious topic.

‘Yes, Alison, as I was saying—and you seemed to assent by your silence—many marriages turn out very well that have no better basis than mutual liking.’

‘But in this instance there would be none; and on my side there are loathing and contempt now! How wise the frogs were in Æsop; they had a great mind to have some water, papa, but they did not leap into the well lest they might not get out again.’

‘This is most objectionable language, Alison,’ exclaimed her father; ‘how often am I to remind you that the young ladies of the world we move in—or *should* move in—seldom marry for what poets and fellows of that kind call love, but almost invariably for money and position; and Cadbury is certainly a more than eligible candidate for your hand.’

‘I should like, papa, to have some of

the brightness of a girl's life before I marry.'

'Alison, you could have as much brightness after your marriage as any reasonable being could desire.'

Alison was silent.

Brightness, she was thinking. Yes, with Bevil Goring, but *not* with Lord Cadbury. Oh, why was Bevil so poor that he could not boldly claim her at once; yet, poor as she deemed him to be, gladly would she have cast her lot in life with him, but for the opposition and wishes of the poor old man who lay there.

'Think of how good, how kind Lord Cadbury is, and of the expense to which we must put him,' said Sir Ranald, after a time.

'I think not of that; his kindness is forced upon us; and surely I may consider my own freedom of action, my own wishes, tastes, and life.'

'I wish you would be a little more con-

siderate, and think of your old father at times.'

'Oh, papa!' she exclaimed, reproachfully, and then she sighed bitterly.

'How often and how long, oh heaven! am I to hear all this over and over again?'

'Here comes Cadbury to sit with me, I suppose, so you may go to your own room,' said Sir Ranald, as the suitor appeared at the door in full evening costume prior to sitting down to dinner, and she gladly withdrew.

'Sir Ranald,' said he, in a low but excited tone of voice, 'I have some news for you.'

Now my Lord Cadbury hated sickness, suffering, death-beds, 'and all that sort of thing,' and he had generally avoided Sir Ranald just now, so the latter raised himself on his elbow expectantly.

'News?' said he.

'Yes—that fellow Goring is in Antwerp.'

'Goring! How do you know?'

‘Gaskins saw him on board my yacht, where he actually had the insolence to make some inquiries, but Gaskins is a trump, and sent him on a wrong scent.’

He did not tell the story of this too probable arrest, as the honourable spirit of Sir Ranald Cheyne would never consent to having a conspiracy of that kind hatched, which might prove the utter destruction of an innocent English gentleman, but he knit his brows, and said,

‘We must be careful now, and conceal this circumstance from Alison.’

‘Of course, and you must get well as soon as you can, that we may decamp from Antwerp.’

‘Curse this Goring!’ thought Sir Ranald. ‘A fine fellow truly, who has only his debts and liabilities, no doubt, to offer in lieu of solid marriage settlements; but for him and his mal-influence on that idiot girl, through Cadbury, Essilmont, manor house, tower, and fortalice, mains and acres might

yet all be mine, and my name not be erased from the roll of country gentlemen in Aberdeenshire !'

He sighed and moaned heavily, and Cadbury, who was a bad hand at consolation or sympathy, looked on with angry eyes and knitted brow.

That Alison, with a will of her own, should have a fancy for—even desire to marry—the wrong man was, Sir Ranald at times thought, natural enough, but that she should fancy a 'beggarly fellow' like this Goring, as he deemed him, was monstrous, while Cadbury's wealth and rank were thrown into the opposite scale !

So Cadbury soon withdrew, and Sir Ranald was left to muse sadly and bitterly on the perversity of his only child and the prospects of his race.

He was the last baronet, he knew, of Essilmont, and at his death the last rood that remained to him there—the last of the old, old heritage of his forefathers—would

pass with him, and what then would become of Alison? His proud, yet selfish and affectionate, soul died within him at the thought of her future, if she pursued her present line of conduct.

Ranald was gone, and Ellon too. He must follow soon, and, even if he had his wish, to him it seemed sad in his family vanity that the world should be threatened with the extinction of the good old name of Cheyne of Essilmont, even though the last of the line became Lady Cadbury.

‘Cadbury—faugh—a *parvenu*?’ was his next peevish thought; ‘and now here was this fellow Bevil Goring on their trail, in full search no doubt!’ and he knew that

‘There never yet was human power
That could evade, if unforgiven,
The potent *search* and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.’

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE RUE DES BEGUINES.

‘EVERYONE has a romance in their life,’ Dalton had said to Goring one day referring, no doubt, to the romance that formed a part of his own; ‘to some it comes early, to others late.’

Goring thought of that remark when he found that his abrupt visitor was an officer of gendarmes come to arrest and carry him before a magistrate. For what?

Was this a bit of his romance, or a disgusting reality? We fear he found it the latter eventually.

‘For what am I wanted?’ he asked, haughtily.

‘You will learn that soon enough, monsieur.’

‘And to where must I accompany you?’

‘To the police station—first.’

‘First—and where afterwards?’

‘That is as may be—but I have not come here to answer your questions—especially if asked in such a tone.’

‘I am an officer in Her Britannic Majesty’s service.’

‘Officers in Her Britannic Majesty’s service do not usually come to Belgium with such papers as have been found among your baggage.’

‘The fellow is mad!’ exclaimed Goring, on which the gendarme uttered a growl and struck the brass hilt of his sword significantly with his left hand.

‘If monsieur is a British officer perhaps he has his cards about him?’ he said, after a little pause.

‘Of course I have,’ replied Goring, and proceeded in haste to investigate, but in vain, the pockets of his coat.

‘The case is gone; I have dropped it

somehow,' he exclaimed, in perplexity and confusion.

'Bah!' exclaimed the gendarme; 'I thought so—come along; we are but wasting time.'

A voiture was summoned. A gendarme mounted on the box beside the driver, other two stepped inside with Goring, who, thus escorted, was driven in silence through several streets, just as the lamps were being lighted, to a police station in a narrow alley, near the Rempart Saint Catharine, where he was conducted into a species of office, over the mantelpiece of which were the ancient arms of the city of Antwerp, like those of Edinburgh, a castle triple-towered with three banners, each bearing a human hand, and there he found himself before a Juge de Paix or Préfet he knew not which; but a portly individual armed with considerable authority, and determined apparently to use it.

'For what purpose or reason am I

brought here, monsieur?' asked Goring, haughtily and angrily.

The man in authority—the Préfet, we shall call him—drew from his pocket a bronze medal attached to a ribbon, and shook it in his face, saying brusquely,

'I will teach you to know the Belgian colours when you see them. Gardez-vous!' he added.

Goring was too much of a soldier and gentleman to insult or resist any constituted authority, and, believing the whole affair to be, if not a joke, some explainable mistake, waited the next move with patience.

A whispered conversation went on in French between his captors and the Préfet, who made several entries in a large book, looking through his large, round spectacles at their prisoner from time to time, and then most severely at a little roll of printed papers, which the officer of gendarmes laid before him.

'What is all this about—what is the

meaning of this absurdity, this outrage?' demanded Goring.

'No outrage at all,' replied the official, knitting his brows.

'Why has my baggage been seized!'

'You will learn in good time. *Sapristi!*'

'Why not now?'

'Well, it contained what it should not.'

'My baggage?'

'Yes.'

'It was duly inspected by the *douanier* at the quay and passed.'

'Yes; your portmanteau, as he is here ready to affirm,' replied the Préfet; 'but not your roll of railway rugs?'

'And what the deuce was in it?'

'That which you were too cunning to have in your portmanteau.'

'Too cunning to put in my portmanteau!' said Goring, in utter bewilderment, and almost inclined to laugh now.

'*Sapristi!*' exclaimed the other, using that exclamation which is for ever on a Belgian

tongue ; ‘ don’t repeat my words, insolent ! You concealed there these revolutionary papers, the existence of which and your object in coming to Belgium were duly and fortunately reported to the police the moment you stepped upon the Quai Van Dyck.’

‘ My object—reported—and by whom ?’

‘ I do not precisely know—one of your countrymen, however ; it was reported to the gendarme on duty there, and the report proved a true one. Here is a roll of nearly fifty circulars issued by the chiefs of the late French Commune in three languages, one of them being Flemish, inciting a rising against kings and all constituted authorities, which no doubt you intended to distribute here in the cause of liberty, equality, fraternity, and social democracy.’

Goring was so confounded by all this that he remained for a moment or two silent, and then he laughed heartily.

‘ You will find this no laughing matter—

Sapristi,' exclaimed the other, dipping a pen in the ink-bottle. 'Your name, coquin?'

Goring's brow knit at this epithet; so he replied sternly, giving his name and rank.

'Calls himself a British officer, does he?' said the magistrate to the gendarmes, who laughed at it as a joke.

'Were you ever in Belgium before?'

'No.'

'What is your profession or occupation?'

'I have already told you.'

'Are you married?'

'Really, monsieur, your questions border on the impertinent.'

'You are an Englishman?'

'I am glad to say I am.'

'But well acquaint with Lester Squarr, I doubt not, where all the foreign *canaille* do congregate?'

'You are an insolent fool.'

'We shall teach you to play tricks in Belgium, however.'

'D—n Belgium!' exclaimed Goring,

losing patience utterly at last. 'I wish it was a few inches under the sea, instead of being a few inches out of it.'

'*C'est excellent, c'est excellent! Je déclare qu'il est incorrigible. Gendarmes, remenez-le à Prison—Rue des Beguines,*' exclaimed the Préfet, furiously.

'This is beyond a joke now, by Jove; it is as well the mess don't know of it,' was Goring's first thought. 'I should be quizzed to death as the agitator of Republican principles in Belgium. And this cursed confusion and detention will prevent me from discovering Alison.'

He was now deprived of *her* ring, in spite of all his protestations and supplications that it might be left with him; his watch and purse were also taken from him; but all were carefully put past, however, and in a few minutes more, escorted by gendarmes with drawn swords, and followed by a crowd of fellows in blue blouses and wooden sabots, he was conducted past the church of

St. Augustine, in the Rue des Beguines, to the great towering prison, the walls of which overshadow the centre of the Rue des Beguines, and there, after being formally handed over to the care of the *concierge* in a little chamber scantily furnished, with a strongly grated window, he found himself left to his own reflections.

Pride of his position as an English gentleman, and as a British officer bearing the Royal commission, rose in revolt in his heart at the grotesque insult put upon him through some extraordinary mistake ; and though he was conscious that the rascally valet Gaskins had deceived him as to the address of his master, and was aware that the latter and Sir Ranald too would now be put upon their guard and shift their quarters, thus making approaches to Alison more difficult, Goring never for a moment connected him with his present predicament, the escape from which, by some legal and constitutional measure, would have to be seen to at once.

Doubtless with morning the whole folly of the affair would be brought to light, and in the meanwhile he could but resort to patience, while the hours were chimed and carillons rung in the adjacent church of St. André, wherein a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots now marks the grave of two English ladies, her attendants, one of whom received her last embrace previous to her execution.

He could also hear the artillery trumpets sounding tattoo in the Caserne des Predicateurs, and the sound made him think of the merriment and luxury prevailing at that very hour in the mess-room at Aldershot, and of his regiment now far away on the billow in the transport then steaming along the western coast of Africa.

Then his adopted patience deserted him, and he started to his feet, only to anathematise the people of Antwerp generally, their authorities in particular, and to seat himself hopelessly again on a somewhat hard chair.

Morning came; the day passed on and

the evening also, and again he heard the shrill trumpets pealing out tattoo in the echoing square of the artillery barracks; and many days and nights followed each other, till he was well-nigh mad with exasperation and anxiety, but no token came of release or further examination.

If some absurd or misleading paragraph appeared in the Belgian papers, and from these found its way into the English journals, what strange views of his predicament might not be taken by his friends and the military authorities at home!

But the Belgian police, like other similar forces on the Continent, are very reticent with reference to their own movements and affairs; and, as yet, they prevented him from communicating with our consul at Antwerp, our ambassador at Brussels, or by letter with his solicitors, Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, & Scrawly, Gray's Inn Square, the presence of one of whom in Antwerp might have proved of vast service to him just then.

So the weary days passed on, and Bevil Goring thought with truth that he would have cause to remember long the bitter coffee and onion soup—or *soupe-maigre*—and the *Ratatouil*, Flemish for a ragout made of scraps of meat, during his enforced abode in the Rue des Beguines !

CHAPTER XVII.

ENNUI AND WEARINESS.

BUT for her love for Bevil Goring, Alison felt at times that she would have sacrificed herself for her father. Selfish and coldly proud though his nature was, still he *was* her father, and she was his last link to earth—the last link of that long chain of ancestors he prized so much, and who went back to the years of the War of Independence, and beyond them.

Yes—out of pity for him she might have sacrificed herself to Cadbury; but now the image of Bevil Goring rendered that impossible, and even death itself preferable.

Poor girl! moped in that great dull hotel, she wearied sorely. Her father was kind to

her after a fashion of his own, but she longed regretfully for the past time when she could throw her arms around her mother's neck and lay her head upon her breast—the panacea for all young folks whose troubles seem overwhelming; but what were the troubles that beset her when that dear mother was alive, compared with those that beset her now?

And with regard to these, she knew what that mother's advice would have been:—
'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.'

My Lord Cadbury was rather tiring, or getting exasperated by the slow success of his love affair, and was beginning to think seriously of how he would separate Alison from her 'bore of a father,' and get her alone with him, perhaps to Brussels, where his rascal Gaskins would easily procure him apartments.

For some time past his lordship had cunningly dropped the *rôle* of lover and adopted

that of friend, perhaps to throw Alison off her guard, and as he did not—as some old fellows do—act ‘the paternal’ part, to a certain extent she became so, and her normal state or feeling of defiance and dislike was dulled for a time.

Thus her face looked calm and placid, with a curiously pathetic expression, and her eyes had at times a far-away look in them that gave Sir Ranald a strange dull pain in his heart, especially one evening, when, taking grapes one by one from a plate of painted Antwerp china-ware, she fed him playfully as a nurse might a child.

‘Bird Ailie,’ said he, ‘my dear bird Ailie.’

He saw how her hand looked quite transparent, and a pang of dismay smote his heart.

‘You are not well, darling,’ said he.

‘Oh, yes, papa,’ she replied, with affected cheerfulness, ‘I am very well; but oh, if we were only home again out of this foggy Antwerp. I think I could wheel you about

in a bath chair as well as old Archie, were we only home to——’

‘*Where?*’ he asked, sharply. ‘But I must take care of you now for my own sake. This confinement is killing you; go out somewhere, anywhere under Cadbury’s escort.’

But Alison shook her head. As yet she had seen nothing of the famous city of Antwerp, though she could not look forth from her windows in the quaint Place Verte, or along the *Marché aux Souliers*, with all its shops, without a longing to explore, everything seemed so strange, so striking; for, as Sir Walter Scott wrote truthfully and graphically, ‘it is in the streets of Antwerp and Brussels that the eye rests upon the forms of architecture which appear in the pictures of the Flemish school—those fronts richly decorated with various ornaments, and terminating in roofs, the slope of which is concealed from the eye by windows and gables still more highly ornamented; the

whole comprising a general effect which, from its grandeur and intricacy, at once amuses and delights the spectator. In fact, this rich intermixture of towers and battlements and projecting windows, highly sculptured, joined to the height of the houses and the variety of ornaments upon their fronts, produce an effect as superior to those of the tame uniformity of a modern street as the casque of a warrior exhibits over the slouched, broad-brimmed beaver of a Quaker.'

Another remarkable feature in the Belgian streets is the enormous height of the front doors, with rings and knockers of brass often more than a foot in diameter.

Lord Cadbury had received a card of invitation *pour milord et ses dames* to a *Redoute monstre et fête de nuit* at the Théâtre des Variétés, where there was to be a species of *bal masqué* in the great saloon, and on the stage a 'Kermesse Flamande, Fête Vénitienne,' as it was announced, and he en-

treated Sir Ranald's permission to take Alison with him, simply as a spectator in her street costume.

All the ladies who dance at these balls wear masques and black silk dominoes over their ball dresses; the gentlemen are in evening dress, and do not wear masks, as he explained to her, and Alison, *ennuyed* and weary of confinement and dulness, consented to go, at her father's urgent request, though she was without a chaperon; but then, as the former said, no one knew her in Antwerp.

When Alison thought of Lord Cadbury's wishes and proposals as regarded herself, she felt that she ought not to accompany him to this fête, but her love for Bevil seemed to guard her like a suit of armour; the temptation to see a little of outdoor life prevailed, and so she yielded, but not without dread and reluctance. Was this a prevision of what was to come?

That morning she had been at a well-

known *coiffeur's* getting her hair dressed, and was rather scared than amused to see gentlemen and ladies seated side by side in the saloon, under the hands of his assistants, the former getting their beards shaved and moustaches trimmed, and the latter their back hair brushed and dressed: but, though this was only a specimen of the freedom of Belgian life, young ladies, she knew, could not go abroad without a chaperon; but then, Lord Cadbury, she reflected, was old enough to be her father.

He would take the greatest care of her—the scene would be a brilliant one, and one, moreover, entirely new to her.

‘And I am not to go in costume, or wear a domino?’ said Alison, anxiously.

‘No—as a spectator only—your hat and sealskin jacket, of course; but we shall see the dancers from the promenade round the saloon, and the Flemish scene on the stage about half-past ten.’

‘Can you spare me, papa?’ she asked, softly.

‘Yes, darling, go,’ he replied, weakly but earnestly.

So a voiture was summoned, and Alison departed, after dinner, escorted by Lord Cadbury. Through the broad and spacious Rue de l’Hôpital and Rue Grande, with its quaint old houses, to the private entrance of the Théâtre des Variétés in the Rue des Escrimeurs, a narrow street, and never in all her future life did she repent of any action more bitterly.

The brief change of scene or action would draw her from herself, as she had been afflicted with severe distracting thoughts of late.

Had Bevil gone to the seat of war, or was he still in England? She was as ignorant of his movements as he nearly was of hers; but it was too probably the former, and she supposed he would soon be face to face with danger and death. Her absence—her flight it would seem—from Chilcote, she supposed, must be all unexplained to

him, and, if explained, he would learn that she was with Lord Cadbury; and, after all he knew, what might he not fear and *think*?

Think that which might lead him to believe she was untrue, and leave him to be happy yet with some *other* girl, who might love him as she now loved him, and as he wished to be loved.

And more keenly did these thoughts distract her mind after the—to her—fatal night of the *bal masqué*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LE REDOUTE MONSTRE.

ALISON found herself in a great oblong saloon, brilliantly lighted by crystal gaseliers, decorated by lofty mirrors, surrounded by a colonnade of elegant pillars and overlooked by a balustraded orchestra occupied by the fine band of the Garde Municipale. The centre of this saloon, the floor of which was carefully waxed, was specially reserved for dancers; but a platform on four sides of it, and without the lines of pillars, was occupied by promenaders, for whom there were seats and lounges.

One end was closed by the proscenium and green curtain of the Théâtre des Variétés.

The majority of the male dancers were in evening costume, though a few wore fancy dresses, and there were spider-waisted Belgian officers from the adjacent Caserne St. Georges, with loose gold epaulets, dark blue tunics, and baggy light grey pantaloons.

Many of the ladies were in fancy costume—some a little *prononcé*, being almost that of the Corps de Ballet, though their dresses were often trimmed with rich, old, coffee-coloured Flemish lace; but the majority wore dominoes of black satin or silk, and all had black velvet masks and thin black lace veils, or head-dresses, like the Spanish mantilla, so commonly worn by the women in some parts of Belgium—a relic of the days of the Duke of Alva—the ‘Castigator de los Flamencos.’

Many were hovering about in corners, or near certain pillars, evidently waiting to keep appointments made elsewhere with those who would recognise them—though masked to the upper lip—by a particular

flower worn in the breast, by the rosettes on their white kid boots, a little patch on the chin, or so forth; and while the round dances—waltzes, polkas, and mazurka—were in progress, Alison, to whom the scene was entirely new, watched the lovers—for such she supposed they must be, and no doubt many were—and, with an interest in which her own heart shared, saw many a glad meeting, a smile, a pressure of the hand interchanged; and then by tacit consent they whirled into the gay and fast-increasing throng, while overhead the music of Straus or Chopin came pealing from the lofty orchestra.

Alison felt her little feet beating time to the music, the 'Soldatenlieder' of Herr Gung'l, 'Je t'aime' of Waldteufel, and so forth. How she longed, sealskin jacket and all, to join in the then delicious waltzes! She was very young, and life would indeed be wretched were it a blank at her years. The whole scene was a novel and brilliant

one ; most strange to her eyes, and, if her situation was an anxious one in Antwerp, it was not without its sad romance ; but for a time, as she looked around her, she forgot even that, or was only recalled to it when Lord Cadbury addressed her.

And, meanwhile, the parvenu peer, pleased with the delicate beauty of his companion, in whose pale cheeks a little rose-leaf tint now came, with a sparkle in her usually quiet eyes, felt very vain of the handsome girl who leant on his arm, and attracted the admiration of many a passing and many a lingering man, who hovered near to admire her.

Among these were two Englishmen, Sir Jasper Dehorsey (a sporting baronet) and his friend, Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, also well-known, and not very reputably, on various racecourses. They seemed to know no one there, and were mere spectators, though doubtless amid that vast throng they might have introduced themselves to some of the

fair dominoes without being severely repulsed.

Both were in full evening-dress, with loose, light dust coat worn open, and crush hat under the arm; both were gentlemanly in bearing and appearance, and their faces would have been good but for the sinister, rakish, and *blasé* expression of their eyes, and the sensual and sneering curve of their lips. Sir Jasper, the taller of the two by half a head, stuck his glass in his right eye, and said,

‘Tom, look at that girl with the blue velvet hat; she is English—I’ll swear she is.’

‘And a regular beauty, by Jove!’

‘Doodid curious place for her to be, this. She is all right, I suppose; what do *you* think?’

‘I think it doubtful—hails from the latitude of Regent Street, I should say,’ replied the other, who thought evil of everyone and everything.

‘Who is that *moyen-âge* individual with

the white horse-shoe shaped moustache and coarse ears, who seems to regard her with such a proprietary air ?'

'By Jove, it is old Cadbury!' exclaimed Mr. Hawksleigh.

'Cadbury—it is!' added the baronet; 'the little party can't be particular to a shade if she is with *him*. She'll not set much store on the whole duty of woman.'

'What is that?' asked Hawksleigh.

'Why, to get married—to get well married, if possible, but anyhow, to get married on any terms.'

'He is a lord; but a silk purse can't be made out of a sow's ear.'

'I am too poor a devil just now to sneer at his money or position, or, by Jove, I would do so at both. His father was "something" in the city, whatever that means. Let us take the girl from him.'

'All right—I am your man,' exclaimed Hawksleigh.

'He doesn't seem to have even an old

woman to play propriety or act chaperon.'

'When did *he* ever study Mrs. Grundy? But to see such a girl as this with him reminds me of Beauty and the Beast.'

'Her wisdom is no doubt in her dressing-case, and her modesty—well, ah—in her pocket, I suppose. Well, here goes——'

'Stop, don't be too hasty. Ah! the old rip, he doesn't care about acting lotus-eater at Cadbury Court, and so has come abroad with "somebody's luggage." *Who* can the little girl be?'

'Not much, when she is with him, as I said before,' responded the *blasé* baronet. 'We'll soon find out. Like the conspirators in a burlesque, who turn up the collars of their coats, we must say, "Let us dissemble!"'

What their precise plans were they perhaps scarcely knew, but half-past ten was announced as the time when, as the programme had it, the curtain was to rise on the *Rideau de Séparation de la Scène, et com-*

mencement de la Kermesse, when the stage appeared with a landscape and busy groups in peasant costume, showing the whole business of a Flemish fair; the dancing ceased, and an immediate rush towards the proscenium took place from all parts of the saloon, the refreshment-rooms, and adjacent passages.

The Belgians are not famous for their politeness, and many of those present on this occasion were of the bourgeois class; thus when the curtain rose there was instantly a rough, unceremonious, and furious crowding towards the proscenium, and in the crush the hand of Alison was torn from the arm of Cadbury, and they were hopelessly separated by a crowd of more than a thousand persons, tightly wedged together.

So far were they apart that he totally failed to see anything of her or where she was, and nearly an hour elapsed before the follies of the *Kermesse* were over, and a resumption of the dancing dispersed the

crowd about the greater space of the saloon. Immediately on this taking place, Cadbury began a search on every hand, amid all the groups and in all the adjacent rooms and corridors—even between the wings of the now open stage—for Alison, but she was nowhere to be seen.

He questioned the waiters, the door-keeper, and other officials, but none had seen any lady, who answered to the description given, leave the hall.

Midnight was past now, and as the *bal masqué* would last till four in the morning hundreds of more ticket-holders came crowding in, and Cadbury became at last convinced—and with no small alarm—that Alison must have quitted the place, and missing him, or indifferent as to what he might think, had got a voiture and driven home to their hotel.

When he quitted the theatre and got a similar vehicle snow was falling heavily, and when he reached the Hôtel St. Antoine great was his alarm and dismay to find from the *con-*

cierge and waiters that she had not returned!

Not returned—snow falling and the cathedral bell tolling one in the morning.

Her room was searched; she was evidently not there—not with her father or in any part of the house. No doubt remained of that.

With all his selfishness, Cadbury was dismayed and enraged. Where was she—with whom?

The snow was still falling, and the storm showed no sign of abatement. The vast space of the Place Verte was one sheet of white, across which the lights from the hotel windows and the street lamps cast long lines of radiance, and high in the tall spire jangled the merry carillons.

‘Out in a night like this—in a foreign city, more than half the inhabitants of which speak nothing but Flemish, where can she be?’ he thought. ‘Why does she not make an effort to get back to the hotel?’

He drove back to the Théâtre des Varié-

tés, where the music and the dancing were still in full progress, to repeat his inquiries in vain ; when morning dawned the snow had ceased, but there was no appearance of Alison.

‘ This will kill her father ! ’ was now Cadbury’s thought.

. Had an accident befallen her ? With earliest dawn he had messengers despatched to all the hospitals and gendarme stations, but in vain. No accident had happened, nor had anyone answering to the description of Alison been seen.

Her absence could no longer be concealed from her horrified father, who at once concluded that she must have eloped with Goring, of whose predicament and whereabouts Cadbury had kept him ignorant, so he was not ill-pleased to let him think so.

Rage at the adventurer, as he deemed Goring, acted like a spur on Sir Ranald. He left his sick couch and seemed to make a struggle to get well that he might join in the search and trace *them* out.

Cadbury had not been without daring ideas of luring Alison away from Sir Ranald and compromising her ; but now she was he knew not where, and in the hands of a man perhaps more unscrupulous than himself!

His memory was now full of the hundred terrible stories he had read in the public prints of English girls entrapped to Belgium and never heard of again, and, though his mind was always prone to evil, he was exasperated as well as dismayed when days passed and no tidings were heard of the lost one.

It was winter in earnest now. The banks of the Scheldt were fringed by masses of ice, and ice covered all the great bassins of Antwerp, while stainless snow shrouded all the surrounding country, and the stone Madonnas at the street corners had a chill and deadly aspect, for it was weather to make hands blue and noses red, as the frost was keen and strong.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAFE AU PROGRES.

THE two Englishmen to whom we have referred—Sir Jasper Dehorsey and Mr. Tom Hawksleigh—saw how Cadbury and Alison were for the time hopelessly separated by the pleasure-seeking crowd, and hastened at once to improve the occasion by taking advantage of the confusion and of her excessive dismay.

After a word or two of hasty instructions whispered to his friend, Sir Jasper approached Alison, and said, with a profound bow,

‘They are rather *sans cérémonie* here, but don’t be alarmed. I shall take care of you. Trust to me, and permit me,’ he added,

drawing her little hand over his left arm, and leading her away in a direction opposite to where he knew Cadbury was doing his utmost to get free of the crowd. 'Do not be alarmed,' he resumed, 'we shall soon restore you to your friend.'

He spoke most *sauvely*, as though he was, what he wished her to think him—a chivalrous and gallant protector, and, sooth to say, Alison was glad to hear an English voice, and to see some one who appeared like an English gentleman, and, externally, Sir Jasper certainly was one.

'This way, please; let me draw you out of the crowd,' said he, guiding her towards one of the saloon doors.

'How rude—how rough the people are,' exclaimed Alison, with reference to the crowd that separated her from Lord Cadbury, of whom she could see nothing now, and the hubbub of the *kermesse* on the stage was stunning.

'Well,' said Sir Jasper, with a lazy smile,

‘they are not the *crème de la crème* of Antwerp, nor *crème* of any kind; and, truth to tell, I was surprised to see you here.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed Alison, with annoyance at having been lured, as she certainly was, into a false position.

At that moment Mr. Hawksleigh, who had been in the corridor, came to say that Lord Cadbury, being unable to find the young lady, had gone to the Café or Restaurant au Progrès.

‘Without me!’ exclaimed Alison.

‘His lordship felt faint, and awaits you there.’

‘Did he say so?’

‘Yes,’ was the reply of the unblushing Mr. Tom Hawksleigh.

‘Most strange!’

‘Shall we not follow him?’ urged Sir Jasper, with his blandest tone.

‘I ought to go home to the Hôtel St. Antoine,’ said Alison, with doubt now added to her dismay.

‘You can’t do that alone. The Restaurant au Progrès is close by—almost a part of the theatre—and if Lord Cadbury is unwell——’

‘Then let us go instantly, please.’

He led her at once from the hall and down the staircase, up which fresh groups—men in evening dress and ladies in masks and dominoes—were crowding, all laughing and joyous, and thence into the Rue des Escrimeurs, where they crossed the street, and entered a brilliantly lighted café; but avoiding the great pillared dining or supper hall, which was fitted up with marble tables, crowded with guests (many of them masked dominoes), he led her upstairs to a private supper-room, preceded by a waiter, to whom he gave some instructions rapidly in French.

Where was Lord Cadbury, he inquired.

The waiter did not know. Among the many now in the café, milord might be one; but he would inquire. Meantime, what did monsieur wish for supper.

In the fair cheek of Alison the delicate colour came and went, and in her eyes there was a strange look of inquiry as she glanced from one man to the other, ignorant that in an instant there was a secret understanding between them, and that the Belgian *valet de cabaret* took in the whole situation at once.

‘Supper—ah—*à la carte*—salmi of guinea fowl, Ris d’Agneau, sauce champignon, and some Moselle. Meantime, ask for his lordship.’

The waiter grinned in what Alison thought a disagreeable manner, and disappeared with his towel over his arm.

The decorations of the little room were very handsome. The hangings were of blue silk, the floor was polished oak, and the chairs were all lounges of blue velvet, but some of the statuettes on brackets and consoles were, to say the least of them, a little startling in design.

‘This is a very strange place,’ said Alison.

‘I cannot imagine what induced Lord Cadbury to select it.’

‘Have you been in this part of the world long?’ asked Sir Jasper, as he divested himself of his light dust-coat.

‘A few weeks—I was about to say years.’

‘Poor girl! Has the time been so slow?’

‘Well,’ said Alison, haughtily, as she disliked his pitying tone, ‘I have the old and ailing——’

‘Cadbury to nurse—surely not?’

‘Of course not, sir. How could you suppose that?’

‘Pardon me.’

Proud as Lucifer with all her sweetness, thought Sir Jasper, as Alison bowed haughtily, but no smile spread over the regular contour of her face.

‘We have met before—at least, I remember now to have had the pleasure of seeing you,’ said he.

‘When?’

‘This very day.’

‘But where?’

‘At the coiffeur’s in the Rue des Tanneurs. I sat beside you, and saw your hair dressed, and lovely hair it is!’

‘You sat beside me?’

‘Yes, and watched you.’

‘Why?’

‘I ought to apologise for making a lady’s face a study; but need I say how deeply yours interested me?’

He was bending over her chair now in perfect confidence. He thought he had her in his power, and felt

‘How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done.’

Not that he thought there was much harm in ‘levanting with old Cadbury’s girl;’ it seemed rather a joke, in fact!

‘Won’t you take off your hat and sealskin before Lord Cadbury comes?’ he urged, in a low voice.

‘No—excuse me; and I shall not take them off after he does come.’

‘Why so? Will you sup with them on?’

‘Yes—or I don’t want supper at all.’

‘A deuced decided little party,’ thought Sir Jasper, who never took his *blasé* eyes off her.

‘Where can Lord Cadbury be?’ she exclaimed, impatiently, after the waiter had gone twice in search of him in vain.

‘Can’t say for the life of me; are you anxious about him or yourself?’

‘Myself, perhaps.’

‘Oh, be assured I shall take the greatest care of you,’ said Sir Jasper, noting with delight how perfect was the contour of her face, the form of her hands and ears.

‘Thanks; but this situation is intolerable—he ought to be here.’

‘I wonder he doesn’t look better after his property.’

‘What *do* you mean?’ asked Alison, at this impudent remark. ‘I am not his property.’

‘Oh—a relation, perhaps.’

‘Not even a relation.’

‘And you came to Antwerp some weeks ago?’

‘Yes.’

‘From Paris?’

‘No; from Southampton in his yacht.’

‘In his yacht—oh, by Jove! what other ladies were of *his* party?’ asked Sir Jasper, quizzically, while stroking his tawny moustache.

‘No lady but me.’

‘In—deed!’

There was profound insolence in his drawl, yet Alison never suspected it.

Sir Jasper Dehorsey now believed that he might be as impudent as he chose; but the girl’s manner nevertheless bewildered him.

‘Why, sir, do you stare at me so?’ she asked.

‘May I not look at you?’

‘Not as you do,’ she replied, with hauteur.

‘ You grudge me that pleasure ?’

‘ I do not understand all this !’ she exclaimed, as she started from her chair and felt a difficulty in restraining her tears.

‘ Do be seated. If Cadbury does not appear in five minutes, I shall go in search of him.’

‘ Or kindly get me a voiture to the Hôtel St. Antoine.’

‘ So it is there they hang out,’ thought he.

‘ Do you often go to the theatre ?’

‘ Not now.’

‘ Ah, you should see Antwerp when it is *en fête*.’

‘ When is that ?’

‘ In the carnival time.’ Then he continued, ‘ And how do you like this city by the Scheldt ?’

‘ Not at all,’ she replied, curtly.

‘ Indeed ! You have been at the opera, of course ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Or the picture galleries ?’

‘No.’

‘What! Have you not seen the Royal Museum, the antiquities at the Steyne, and the Musée Plantin-Moretus?’

‘I have seen none of those things.’

‘Nor the splendid churches, and all the rest of it?’

‘I have been nowhere,’ replied Alison, thinking sadly of her father’s sick-bed.

‘How this old snake has kept this lovely girl all to himself!’ was the thought of Sir Jasper, in whose heart envy now mingled with exultation.

‘How I should like to show you all these places, and Brussels too!’ said he at length.

‘I have often heard of the Musée Plantin, with its quaint old rococo furniture and antique pictures—the old-world air of the place—its stillness and gloomy seclusion,’ said Alison.

‘It is doocid slow. Still I should like to have the pleasure of showing it to you,’ said

he again, stooping over her chair, but seeking even then to throw her off her guard. 'The place itself is rather dark and gloomy with its high wainscots, oak carvings, ebony and ivory cabinets, faded tapestries, casement windows, and all the rest of it—said to be haunted by the ghosts of the funny old printers who lived there and printed the first Bible with old types which are yet there, and which it is said they come once a year at midnight to set up again, for the creak of the ancient presses is heard. But, be all that as it may, I don't know a more stunning place for a steady spoon or flirtation than the solemn old quadrangular Musée Plantin, with its suites of antique rooms, furnished with cushioned lounges, heavy curtains, and beds like tombs—like plumed hearses, or the old state-beds in Hampton Court—beds in which the dead Plantins slept three hundred years ago. By Jove, you must let me show you all that to-morrow. But as that duffer, old Cad-

bury, is so doocid long, had we not better have supper, without him? Shall I order the waiter to serve it up?' he added, laying his hand upon the bell rope, as if her assent would follow of course.

'Oh, no—no,' exclaimed Alison, starting from her seat now in positive alarm at the idea of supping alone with a man whose name was unknown to her, and in whose watery, wicked eyes she was convinced there was an expression now there could be no mistaking.

'A glass of wine, then,' he urged, suavely.

'You must excuse me.'

'How shy you are! I can never imagine why any woman who is young and handsome need be shy.'

'You know Lord Cadbury, of course,' said Alison, suddenly.

'Intimately.'

'May I ask your name?'

'Captain Smith,' he replied, without a

moment's hesitation. 'The world says queer things of old Cadbury.'

'What do people say?'

'Well, people, of course, say anything but their prayers. So rough things are said of Old Cad., as he is called. But never mind him; let us talk of ourselves, and don't look so uneasy. I assure you I am a perfect archangel of virtue, and have always laughed at love at first sight till—*now*,' he said, in a manner so pointed that it made Alison's usually pale cheek flame. 'What a deliciously fresh, unconventional, and lovely little darling you are!' he exclaimed, laying a hand upon her arm.

'Sir!'

'Hoity-toity. Come, it mustn't give itself little airs. Look at that pretty picture.

She gave it a glance. It was the production, doubtless, of some Parisian artist, and the subject made her tremble with fear and just anger.

She felt herself deeply insulted, and was now convinced that she had been ensnared. The blood of a hundred gallant Cheynes welled up in her heart, yet there was an expression of agony in her blue-grey eyes and on her blanched and quivering lips.

At that moment the room door opened, and the waiter appeared with the supper tray. She formed her resolution quick as lightning, and acted upon it quite as quickly. Young, active, and half wild with terror, she darted from the room, nearly knocking over Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, who was coming to enjoy his share of the little supper ordered by Sir Jasper, then down the staircase of the café, and out into the darkened streets, through which she fled like a hunted hare; she knew not in what direction, nor did she care, provided that she was not overtaken by 'Captain Smith' or his companion.

At that hour the streets of Antwerp are usually deserted by all save the gendarmes,

and she had fled a considerable distance, conscious only that the snow was falling fast, before she stopped, quite out of breath, and began to think by what means she could reach the Hôtel St. Antoine, or get a voiture to convey her there.

She had run to the end of the Rue des Arquebusiers, and now before her opened on either hand the long and spacious street called the Place de Mer in which the stately house of Rubens and the royal palace stand side by side.

Not a cab was to be seen, nor a gendarme; the wind was keen, the snow falling heavily, and, like 'Policeman X' and other guardians of the night, the gendarmes had betaken themselves to some cosy estaminet, or sought the hospitality of friendly kitchens and confiding cookmaids.

Which way was she to turn? where seek aid or shelter? She closed her little hands in terror and dismay, and, while shuddering with cold, suddenly a chorus burst upon her

ear, and, before she could think which way to turn, a dozen of great fellows in kepis, blouses, and sabots, fresh from some estaminet, surrounded her, with shouts and mockery.

One put an arm round her and tried to kiss her, tearing away her veil; but endued with strength beyond herself, by the extremity of her terror, she dashed him back with both her hands.

‘God help me!’ she exclaimed.

And hemming her in by a ring, they danced round her hand in hand, singing a song, which, as it was in Flemish and unknown to her, she supposed was something very ribald and horrible, yet it was only thus:—

‘Hark to the sound
Of the fiddle and horn,
The dance and the song—
’Tis a festal morn.

Oh! little they reck of dull care
Or of sorrow;
They laugh for the day
Though they weep on the morrow.’

‘Ouf!’ shouted one, ‘that would make a grand pendant to the *Zeike Jongeling*,’ referring to Jan Van Beers, the greatest lyric poet of the day.

‘Une blonde English mees—une nymphe—*parbleu!*’ cried one fellow.

‘*Sommes-nous fantastiques! N’est-elle pas jolie!*’ (‘Isn’t she pretty!’) cried another.

‘*Sur mon honneur, ma belle coquette?*’ cried a third, making a clutch at her.

Others shouted strange things in Flemish, showing that they were boors or artizans, redolent of garlic, beer, and tobacco; but with a gasping sob of terror she broke away from them and fled again. She heard the clatter of sabots behind her, as some started in pursuit; but she was too swift for them, and the sound soon died away in the distance.

Along the dark and now silent streets she ran, close past the great doors of innumerable houses, as there are no areas or front garden plots in Antwerp, where the

entrances open directly off the footpaths. Many a bell-handle and many a large knocker—lion's heads and bull's heads as large as life—were within her reach ; but, fearing to be roughly or coarsely repulsed, she dared touch neither.

She passed a church of vast height and colossal proportions—St. Jacques, though she knew it not—where Rubens lies under a slab of spotless white marble. There were few lamps in the streets in this quarter, and the oil lanterns before the Madonnas perched on stone brackets at the street corners, swung dimly and mournfully to and fro in the sleety and snowy wind.

She felt an apparently mortal chill in her heart; her whole clothes were now soaked with sleet by her falling once or twice as she slipped.

Again she heard a tipsy chorus ringing out upon the night, and, in terror lest she was about to be overtaken by the roysterers from whom she had escaped, on finding

herself near a great doorway in the Rue Rouge, as it eventually proved to be, she grasped the swinging handle of a bell and pulled it violently. She heard the sound of the bell respond at a distance, and, incapable of further endurance, before the door, which was a double one of great size, was opened, she had sunk down senseless, and lay huddled in a kind of heap upon the step of the house.

The last thing of which she was conscious was feeling the hand of a man roughly and daringly searching her pockets, as he muttered, with an oath,

'Sacré! not a sou—not a centime!'

CHAPTER XX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THE morning was a clear, bright, sunny, and joyous one, the sun without cloud, the chimneys of Antwerp, as usual, without smoke, though the season was winter, and all its spires and countless crow-stepped gables were standing up clearly defined against a pure blue sky, when Bevil Goring, with high spirits, yet not without just emotions of great indignation, walked forth a free man from the place in which he had been detained, and, stepping into a voiture with his luggage, told the driver to take him to the Hôtel du Parc in the Place Verte, and kissed the ring of Alison which was on his finger again. He was free, and it had come about thus :—

The papers and manifestoes found among his property were of so serious and compromising a nature that he was on the point of being transmitted with them to Brussels, but he contrived to employ an *advokat* (as an attorney or barrister is called there) in the Rue de l'Hôpital, who soon traced to the arrested Belgian workman those unlucky papers, and it chanced, oddly enough, that the mischievous Mr. Gaskins, having got a serious smash up in an accident on the railway to Waterloo, believing himself to be dying, made a full confession of the trick he had played to serve a lucrative master; and the Belgian authorities, duly aware at last of Goring's rank and position in society, confessed their haste and mistake, and, with a 'million pardons,' released him from an arrest that, after it had extended to some days, was nearly making him frantic, and he was welcomed and ushered to his former apartment at the hotel by the waiter Jacquot, though Maître Jean Picot, remembering his

arrest, had some unpleasant doubts about receiving him.

Bevil, however, lost no time in repairing to the Hôtel St. Antoine, resolved to see Sir Ranald—Alison too, if possible, if it was not too late ; but he was rather unprepared for the state of affairs that awaited him there.

Meeting the concierge or hall-porter at the door, he asked with some anxiety if Sir Ranald Cheyne was still there.

‘Oui, monsieur,’ replied the porter, saluting in military fashion.

‘And Miss Cheyne?’

‘Non, monsieur.’

The reply sank deep in Goring’s heart, and he was perplexed when the official at the same time mysteriously shook his head and shrugged his shoulders with a deprecatory expression in his face.

‘Is Lord Cadbury here?’

‘Milord is out also,’ was the reply.

‘Also—then they are together!’ thought

Goring. 'Take up my card to Sir Ranald, and ask if he will receive me.'

It was taken up by a waiter, who returned promptly to report, in Continental parlance, that 'Sir Cheyne desired him to walk up.'

Much depended upon the issue of this visit if Alison was still free. He had come frankly, freely, to urge humbly his suit again, backed by the undoubted wealth which had flowed upon him since last they met at Chilcote.

He found Sir Ranald in a handsome apartment, seated in an easy-chair, but looking pale, thin, and worn. He made no offer of his hand, as with both he grasped the arms of the chair, tremulous with rage, while his eyes glared like those of a rattlesnake through the glasses of his *pince-nez* at his unexpected visitor, who scarcely knew how or where to begin, and looked nervously round him for some evidence of the recent presence of Alison, but saw nothing.

‘Permit me to congratulate you, Sir Ranald—’ he began.

‘On what?’ asked the other, savagely.

‘On the escape from death by drowning which we were all led to suppose you and Miss Cheyne had suffered.’

‘I don’t want your congratulations; and, so far as Miss Cheyne is concerned, your appearance in Antwerp sufficiently accounts for her mysterious disappearance.’

Utter bewilderment, in which emotions of dismay, fear, and anger coursed through his mind, tied the tongue of Bevil Goring—dismay and fear he knew not of what, and anger lest this was some fresh trickery of Lord Cadbury.

‘Mysterious disappearance!’ he faltered.

‘Your conduct, Captain Goring, has been shamefully deceitful—most dishonourable!’ exclaimed Sir Ranald, in a broken but still enraged tone.

‘How?’

‘You came to my house at Chilcote a

welcome guest, then you stole the affections of my daughter. You have followed her to Antwerp with plans best known to yourself; and where—oh, where—is she now?’

‘Sir Ranald!’ expostulated Goring, piteously, and feeling his face grow pale.

‘Talk not to me!’ resumed Sir Ranald, in his tone of fury again; ‘every silly girl thinks she is in love, or that she must love the first man who says he loves her.’

These strange utterances made Goring half forget the errand on which he had come, and utterly forget the fortuitous but fortunate wealth which would, he hoped, have made that errand perhaps successful.

‘Vile trickster, you shall answer to me for all the mischief you have wrought!’ exclaimed Sir Ranald, breaking the silence that had ensued, though, if glances could kill, Goring’s earthly career had ended there and then. ‘We are in Belgium, and, old as I am, I shall cover you with a pistol at twelve paces, even if I should be propped

against a post—by heaven I shall! Do you hear me, sir?’

‘You are very wrong, Sir Ranald, to address me thus,’ said Goring, gravely and sadly; ‘and, though you might level ten pistols at me, God forbid that I should level one at you—the father of her I have come so far to seek, and, if I understand your terrible words, apparently in vain.’

‘Don’t speak of my daughter, sir, and don’t attempt to humbug me!’ thundered Sir Ranald, almost beside himself with rage and weakness. ‘Bah!’ he added, scornfully, ‘to follow her here was pleasanter and safer work than fighting the Ashantees. Will you meet me at any time or place—we may select to-morrow?’

‘For what purpose?’

‘Can you ask? To fight me.’

‘Absurd—I shall not.’

‘You will not?’

‘No.’

‘Coward!’

‘You are mad, Sir Ranald, to address me, a tried soldier, thus injuriously,’ said Goring, more sadly than bitterly. ‘I have worn my Victoria Cross,’ he added, striking his breast, ‘by no solitary act of rashness, but by acknowledged proofs of disciplined courage! and my name has an echo still on the north-east frontier of India.’

‘Coward!’ hissed the old man’s voice again, as he looked round for some missile to throw at the head of his visitor, who, seeing it was useless to protract an interview so painful and terrible, at once withdrew, and the fierce, mocking laughter—and strange laughter it was—of Sir Ranald jarred sorely on his ear as he did so.

His head was in a whirl—what was to be done? The old man’s anger and epithets he pardoned; but from his utterances he gathered that Alison was abducted or absent, and that *he* was supposed to be the author of the mystery that now filled him with terror and anxiety.

When was she missed? Had she been decoyed from the hotel, or abducted in the street, and how long since?

On these points the concierge, on having a couple of five franc pieces deftly slipped into his palm, soon enlightened him.

She had gone one night with Lord Cadbury to the Théâtre des Variétés, and milord had come home without her in great terror and dismay, all search had proved unavailing, even the ponds in the Park of the Avenue Rubens had been dragged in vain till the ice came.

‘How long is it since she disappeared?’

‘A week ago, monsieur.’

A mortal terror smote the heart of Goring as he listened; but rage greatly took its place when the concierge, with apparent sympathy, referred to the dismay and anxiety of Milord Cadbury.

This Goring deemed but trickery to cover some act of deceit he had perpetrated, and terribly did the as yet baffled lover resolve

to punish it ; but he was rather surprised at first by the manner in which he was suddenly accosted by Cadbury, who now by chance entered the vestibule of the hotel in which several waiters were loitering, and, with all an Englishman's genuine horror of a 'scene,' made an effort to keep his temper.

As if following suit with Sir Ranald, the peer, who now connected Alison's disappearance with Goring's liberty, though the dates did not tally, said to him haughtily, and in a low tone,

'So, Captain Goring, it seems to have pleased you to follow my intended wife.'

'*Your* intended wife !'

'Miss Cheyne of Essilmont, to this place—to Antwerp, and that you have forced yourself upon her as soon as you had the opportunity of finding her alone. By heavens, you must have watched her steps closely.'

'Shuffler and juggler !' exclaimed Goring, in his rage becoming as furious in his speech as Sir Ranald.

‘May I ask your reason for daring to apply these epithets to me?’ asked Cadbury, reddening with passion to the tips of his coarse, hairy ears.

‘I shall give them to you on the ramparts of the citadel, in the Champ de Manœuvres, or anywhere else you choose.’

‘Are you engaged in a melodrama, without a musical accompaniment?’ asked Cadbury, with a sneer.

‘You will find it terribly real, I promise you.’

‘Braggadocio!—behind the age. Bah! people don’t fight duels now.’

‘Cads and Cadburys, perhaps.’

‘Permit me to pass,’ said the peer, assuming what he thought an air of dignity that only made his vulgar little figure look more absurd.

‘Not until I am fully answered,’ replied Goring, resolutely barring his way.

‘Of your past intentions, Captain Goring, we——’

‘Who are *we*?’

‘Sir Ranald and myself.’

‘Well?’

‘Of your past intentions we have an idea; but what are your present?’

‘To discover her, and carry her off,’ replied Goring, passionately.

‘You know but too well where she is; but I don’t understand why you come brawling in my hotel. Concierge, get a gendarme, and have this fellow expelled.’

‘Will you meet me?’ asked Goring, in a low and concentrated voice.

‘Most certainly not. No man of honour is obliged to go out with a man who has been in the hands of the gendarmerie and inside a prison.’

This recalled the story of the ‘papers,’ and roused Goring’s blood to boiling heat.

He suddenly, to the mingled amusement and dismay of the concierge and group of wondering waiters, made a brisk manual application to the nose of my Lord Cad-

bury, which he took between the first and second fingers of his right hand, and therewith administered such a wrench as made the 'hereditary legislator' dance with rage and pain.

'Now,' thought Goring, as he flung a card at Cadbury's feet, and strode into the broad and sunlit Place Verte, 'he must come out, or the devil is in it!'

Little did either know how completely they were all at *cross purposes!*

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CHALLENGE.

BEVIL GORING had latterly from various sources heard much of Cadbury's general character, which fully bore out the opinions expressed of him by the two *vauriens*, who were quite as unscrupulous—to wit, Sir Jasper Dehorsey and Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, and, like him, knew many of 'the soiled doves who flutter from tree to tree in the forest of St. John, or build their nests in Brompton Groves.'

'The union of January and May is so common now-a-days,' says the author of 'Barren Honour,' 'that no one thinks of inditing epithalamia thereon, satiric or otherwise.' But that Alison could be in any way

a party to the trickery of which the wealthy Cadbury was quite capable, was not for a moment to be imagined, as she idolised her father, with all his defects of temper and character, and would never leave him a prey to doubt and anxiety, though at present these emotions rather took the form of parental indignation. So what then was to be thought?

Where could she be secluded, and under what circumstances concealed from her father, whose bearing, however offensive to Goring, seemed genuine—the result of conviction? As for Cadbury, Goring misdoubted him, and believed him acting out a *rôle*, by which he had imposed upon Sir Ranald.

He had not the shadow of a doubt of Alison's strength of mind and purity of purpose, yet pressure often achieved much. Her father was evidently ignorant of her whereabouts, and if Cadbury had her on board his yacht, now anchored out in the stream below the Tête de Flandres (which

was not impossible), *how* had she been taken there, and by whom?

Had she been drugged, stupefied, or what? Such things are read of in the public papers every day.

The position was well calculated to fill the mind with perplexity and anxiety, anger and indignation; and thus that of Bevil Goring was a species of chaos!

If Goring actually had Alison with him, why did he act the part he did—why come before him at all? was the thought of Sir Ranald, who missed her sweet presence and gentle ministrations painfully and fearfully.

If Cadbury had her in enforced concealment, what was his purpose in playing the part he did to Sir Ranald? thought Goring; anyhow, a bullet planted in the well-fed person of the noble peer might tend or lead to the revelation of all that, and atone for Goring's recent detention in the Rue des Beguines, so he thirsted almost savagely for the hour of a hostile meeting

such as never could take place in the England of the present day.

That Cadbury should utterly disbelieve him was a matter of course, as it was a point with that personage never to believe sincerely in anyone, or that anyone ever did a single thing without an interested motive. At home he was a man who was arrogant among his equals, a tyrant among his dependents and inferiors, and was the terror of every poacher for thirty miles round Cadbury Court. So his reputation was not a pleasant one.

In coming to Antwerp, Goring had learned one great fact, that she was alive; that she had not perished in the collision at sea; but suppose that, from subsequent circumstances, it were better that the waves had closed over her? or suppose no trace of her were ever to be discovered in any way—that she had disappeared out of the world, as it were?

Such things happen even in London;

so why not on the continent of Europe?

But he thrust these ideas aside as too horrible for contemplation, and bent his whole thoughts to the duel, which he never doubted must come off now, and speedily, after the terrible affront he had put upon Cadbury, in presence of the Flemish servants at the Hôtel St. Antoine.

If it took place, Alison's name, at all hazards, must be kept out of the story, which would be sure to find its way into every 'Society' paper in London, and he shrunk from the fear of her being made the subject of hack gossip, which is ever cynical or worse.

Goring waited all that day at the Hôtel du Parc, expecting some messenger from Lord Cadbury; and he waited a considerable portion of the next; but none came; so he bethought him of sending one on his own account.

He had not a single friend in Antwerp; but during those two days, while at break-

fast and other meals at the *table d'hôte* he had sat next an officer of the Belgian artillery, with whom—in the freemasonry of soldiering—he speedily became intimate, for all soldiers have a thousand interests, sympathies, and topics in common.

Captain Victor Gabion was a handsome fellow, about thirty years of age, with an antique style of head and face, his cheeks a clear olive tint, dark moustache, and keen eye—handsome we say, but of a rare type; a little effeminate, perhaps, but not the less attractive for that. He had a suavity and sweetness of manner. His form was well knit; he was square-shouldered, singularly slender in the waist—but that is affected by all Belgian officers, and as a Captain of Artillery when in undress wore a gold aiguillette on the left shoulder, with cords across the breast.

Full of his own thoughts and terrible anxieties, Bevil Goring was not much in a mood for talking about anything; but

the general bonhomie of Victor Gabion was very attractive and infectious, and so they rapidly became intimate; but we are told that 'there are times when a man must speak—even to a dog or his worst enemy—rather than keep silence altogether.'

No message seemed likely to come from Cadbury, so to kill time Goring had accompanied his new friend to the artillery quarters at the Caserne des Predicateurs, in the street of the name, and so called from being built, no doubt, on the site of an old Dominican convent.

There is a strong family likeness in all barracks, but to Goring's English eyes the brick-floored rooms, the bare brick walls looked strange; so did the batteries of bronzed guns, drawn up wheel to wheel in the square, the meagre onion soup conveyed to the messes in buckets, and the slovenly soldiers, in long-skirted, dark blue coats with red worsted epaulettes, and buttons (*à la Childers*) without numbers on them; and

ever and anon he felt a shiver when he heard their trumpet calls—the calls with which he had become so familiar during his sojourn in the adjacent prison, in the Rue des Beguines, only two hundred metres distant.

‘And your regiment, monsieur,’ asked Gabion, ‘where is it?’

‘We have battalions in India, in Ireland, and one is now, or shall soon be in Ashanti,’ replied Goring.

‘Ah—Sapristi! how I should like to serve in distant lands and colonies!’

‘Belgium must first get them,’ thought Goring. And on returning to the hotel, finding that there was still no message from Cadbury, as his patience was utterly exhausted, he confided in his new friend Gabion.

‘I have had an unpleasant affair with a countryman of mine, a Lord Cadbury, who is now at the Hôtel St. Antoine; and as I have no intimate friend in Antwerp,’ said he, ‘will you as an officer—a brother soldier—arrange for a meeting between us?’

The Belgian tugged his dark moustaches, and hesitated, muttering, of course, the inevitable

‘*Sapristi!*’

‘You understand?’ said Goring.

‘Perfectly; but, *mon ami*, I don’t like duels. I was engaged in one once, and the terrible memory of the part I had unwittingly to play in it haunts me still. What is this quarrel about?’

‘A lady—a lady whose name must at all hazards be kept out of it.’

‘Then no apology will suffice?’

‘None. And you will oblige me?’

‘With pleasure,’ replied the Belgian, as he buckled on his sword, leisurely lit a cigarette and crossed the open, sunny space of the Place Verte, went to the hotel indicated and sent up his card, which, in Belgian fashion, was twice the size of an English one, and bore his name in large letters,

VICTOR GABION,

Capitaine d’Artillerie,

with the letters E. L. V., signifying 'En la Ville;' and after some delay he was ushered into the room of Lord Cadbury, whom he found in a rich *robe de chambre* tied with silk cords, and wearing an elaborate smoking-cap. He laid his cigar on the stove, near which he was standing, and tried to eye his visitor superciliously, and to the acute eyes of the latter his large feet, coarse hands and ears, looked rather strange in an English peer; but he inherited them with the alderman's money, and they showed the plebeian drop in his blood, as also did his love for trinkets and personal adornment.

'You call yourself Captain Victor Gabion of the Belgian Artillery,' said he, glancing at the card, and tossing it beside his cigar.

'I *am* Captain Victor Gabion, of the Belgian Artillery,' replied the officer, quietly.

'And what do you want with me? I have not the honour of your acquaintance,' said Cadbury, having all the while a perfect intuition of his visitor's purpose.

‘I am here in the interest of Captain Bevil Goring, of Her Britannic Majesty’s service, and monsieur must know with what views.’

‘Haven’t the slightest idea,’ yawned Cadbury, yet nervously, as he resumed his cigar.

‘Well, it is to arrange an hour and place for a mutual meeting, with swords, or pistols more probably.’

‘Oh, indeed. Very kind and considerate of you to take such interest in my affairs; but I don’t suppose, Captain—what’s your name?—oh, ah, Victor Gabion—that a peer of the realm was, even of old, when such things were in fashion, obliged to go out with a commoner, nor am I with this fellow, who, as you no doubt know, was but recently in the hands of your authorities. Moreover, people don’t fight duels now.’

‘In England, so I believe, but monsieur is in Belgium.’

‘D—n Belgium, I am not likely to forget that.’

‘If monsieur adopts this tone to me, I shall have the pleasure of a little turn with him after.’

‘After what?’ asked Cadbury, with dilated eyes.

‘After Captain Goring’s affair is over.’

‘The devil you will!’ exclaimed the peer, greatly ruffled.

‘*Sapristi*—yes.’

Pleasant this! thought Lord Cadbury; two duels in prospect after all his schemes, and ‘no end’ of money, and Alison slipped through his fingers after all!

‘Monsieur will refer me to a friend?’ said the Belgian, who waited quietly a little time for him to speak, standing, too, for he had never been offered a chair.

‘A friend—for what purpose?’ asked Cadbury, savagely.

‘To arrange with me for you and Captain Goring.’

Cadbury felt fairly cornered, and com-

pelled to affect a virtue which he did not possess.

‘If monsieur has no friend in Antwerp, one of my brother officers will, I have no doubt, be happy to act for him.’

‘Thanks, very much—what a considerate lot you are, you Belgians! Never mind about a friend—I’ll get one if I want him—name your time and place.’

‘Shall we say eight o’clock to-morrow morning, at the citadel?’

‘All right—I am your man!’

‘In the Lunette St. Laurent, monsieur?’

‘Very good.’

‘Swords or pistols, monsieur?’

‘Oh, the devil—pistols, of course,’ replied Cadbury, as if he was in the habit of fighting a duel every morning.

‘Merci, monsieur, we shall not fail you, and now good evening—bon soir.’

‘Bon soir.’

The manner of Captain Gabion, who had

been eyeing him with some contempt, twirling his moustache the while, changed completely now, and, bowing with studious politeness, he withdrew to report progress to Bevil Goring.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE LUNETTE ST. LAURENT.

A T first a kind of—shall we say it?—savage joy and exultation swelled up in the breast of Goring at the prospect of being face to face with Cadbury again, and already in fancy he was covering with his pistol the spectrum of the peer's thick-set, pudgy person, for he had at first serious doubts—though they were both on the Continent—that the latter would accept his challenge.

'Well, I have faced much in my short time, and figured in many things; but I never thought to do so in such an old-fashioned affair as a duel!' he said, with a grim smile, to his new friend Gabion.

And he wondered what Tony Dalton, Jerry Wilmot, and others of the battalion now far away beyond the equator, would think of the event, when tidings would reach them that he had been shot by Lord Cadbury, or had shot the latter—and in a duel!

How strange it sounded to English ears now!

He wrote to his solicitors to settle a sum stated—a handsome annuity on Alison, if she was found—one that would keep her every way independent alike of her father and Lord Cadbury, if he fell by the hand of the latter—instructions which made those quiet and very acute legal practitioners, Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, and Scrawly, open their eyes very wide indeed, when the letter reached them at Gray's Inn Square.

His reveries were not very rose-coloured, as he might be a dead man long before *this* time to-morrow, he thought, while looking at the clock; however, it did not impair his

appetite, and he and Victor Gabion spent the evening at the Café Grisor, in the Rue Von Shoonhoven, listening to the grand organ which is played by machinery, while enjoying their wine and cigars, far into the small hours of the morning.

Yet we may be sure that there are few men, if they told truth, but would acknowledge that they felt a very unpleasant emotion when thinking that when another round of the clock was achieved their part in this world might be over—ended and done with !

In the morning he was in a brighter mood, and, though infuriated against Cadbury, had no desire to kill, but only to wound him, to the end that he might wring from him the secret of what he had done with Alison. He was a good marksman—had been a musketry instructor—and with rifle and revolver had done some great things among the big game and hill tribes in India.

A revelation was all he wanted. On his

own life, save in so far, as Alison Cheyne was concerned, he set little store. How short seemed the minutes he used to spend with her under the old beeches at Chilcote, or when in Laura Dalton's at the Grange. Short and few, and how much alone he used to feel when not with her !

Now how much more alone he felt, when he seemed to have so mysteriously and painfully lost her !

After some coffee, backed by a *chasse*—*i.e.*, dashed with cognac—he and Gabion—with the latter's case of pistols—departed before sunrise in a voiture for the citadel—a pretty long drive, through winding and tortuous streets, crossing between the great shipping basins at the Quai Hambourg, and ere long the houses were left behind, and the great grassy embankments of the fortress rose before them.

Every feature of the scenery, every detail of what he saw, however petty and trivial, impressed itself curiously upon the mind

of Bevil Goring on this eventful morning.

A group of old peasant women, with wide dark-blue or black cloaks and coal-scuttle bonnets, gossiping in the roadway; children at cottage doors; Flemish labourers, with hard and earnest types of face, leisurely filling their huge pipes with tobacco; a boy sitting on a gate, munching a straw, and dreaming perhaps of the future; the view of the vast Scheldt, curving in a mighty sweep round the flat green Tête de Flandres, with all its steamers and other shipping.

The mighty cathedral spire, and all the thousands of high-peaked roofs and masses of the quaint city, thrown forward in dark outline against the lurid and vapoury red of the winter morning sky, all seen like a vast panorama from the green heights of the citadel. Goring recalled the first morning he had seen the latter from the deck of the *Rotterdam*, and had looked at its great gaping embrasures and lunettes, well flanked

out, with the leisurely interest it cannot fail to have in a soldier's eye.

He was now perhaps looking upon Nature, with all her beauties, for the last time, and the coming spring and summer might be as nought to him, even after the wealth that had come upon him so unexpectedly; but if he was fated to fall by Cadbury's pistol his chief regret was not for these things, but the fear that, unless those in another world are cognisant of what passes in this, he would never know the fate of Alison Cheyne, or penetrate the veil that hid her whereabouts in mystery now!

He listened somewhat as one in a dream to Victor Gabion, who was drawing his attention, with no small pride and enthusiasm, to the features of the mighty model citadel, which is now so deserted in aspect, and the streets in the immediate vicinity of which consist chiefly of the ruins of the arsenals and magazines, that were destroyed in the great siege of 1832, when only 4,500 Dutch-

men, under old General Chassé, defended themselves with such desperation against 55,000 Frenchmen, under Marshal Gerard.

‘My grandfather commanded a regiment on that occasion,’ said Gabion, ‘and opened the ball by attacking this part—the Lunette St. Laurent, which lies nearest to the town. The trenches were nine English miles long, and sixty-three thousand shot and shell were fired into the place before Chassé hauled down his colours. *Sapristi!* but that was something like fighting! *Diable!*’ he added, ‘we are *not* first on the ground.’

Bevil Goring was much mortified to think that in that matter he had been anticipated by Lord Cadbury, when some dark figures appeared hurrying towards them along the *terre pleine* of the ramparts; but it was not so, for those who approached proved to be brother-officers of Gabion’s, who, having been informed by him of the affair, had come forth, as one said, to see ‘le sport.’

All touched their caps, and, after a few

passing remarks, looked round for the appearance of Cadbury and his second, but no one, save themselves, seemed to be in the misty space, or amid the wet grassy works of the citadel, and no voiture from the town was as yet seen approaching the entrance to it. All these Belgian officers, to Goring's eye, seemed very square-shouldered, as they wore blue cloaks over their gold epaulettes. All were chatting and laughing merrily, while smoking as if their lives depended upon it.

'*Sapristi! Sacré Dieu!*' muttered Victor Gabion, looking at his watch, 'ten minutes past eight, and no appearance of milord.'

Time passed on. The cathedral clock struck half-past eight, and eventually nine; but there was no appearance of Cadbury.

'Can he have fallen ill?' was the last of many surmises as to this most unexpected turn in the matter.

'Not likely; he would surely have had the courtesy to send a message, and not

keep us loitering here,' said Captain Gabion.

The Belgians twirled their moustaches, and exchanged glances of derision.

Bevil Goring felt keen shame that any Englishman should act as Cadbury had done, and at last they all left the citadel and drove back to the city.

'*Sapristi!*' was of course muttered by everyone; 'what is to be done now?'

Goring thought, if he could meet his lordship, he would certainly attack him rearward with his foot, and, as Hudibras has it:

'Because a kick in *that* place more
Hurts honour than deep wounds before.'

At the very time that Goring and his companions were cooling their heels on the Lunette St. Laurent, the *Firefly* was steering close-hauled against a head wind, midway between the city and Flushing, with Lord Cadbury on board! Since coming there he had imbibed in his wrath and tribulation of spirit so many of Pemmican's brandies and sodas that Tom Llanyard was puzzled

what to think, and his temper was horrible.

On the preceding afternoon, immediately after the departure of Victor Gabion, he had gone to the telegraph-office near the Bourse, and telegraphed a message to *himself* that he might confidently open it in the presence of Sir Ranald Cheyne. This he accordingly did, and, saying nothing of his recent visitor's purpose, he suddenly announced that he must instantly depart for London by steamer and train, but he hoped that Sir Ranald, whom he left alone in his misery, would telegraph to his club the moment he heard tidings of Alison, on which he, Lord Cadbury, would instantly return to Antwerp. And, after this, the hereditary legislator (by one descent) took his hurried departure.

Goring and his new friend Gabion, by making inquiries, were not long in discovering that he had sailed in his yacht. Could Alison, under any circumstances, be on board that yacht too?

His departure so suddenly, if no puzzle to Goring, was certainly one to Sir Ranald, upon whose acceptance the peer pressed a little cheque for any present necessities, and he was just then sick of the whole affair.

Bevil Goring could go near Sir Ranald no more, but, as he loitered near the hotel, could he have looked in upon him just then he would have forgiven him, and more than forgiven him all, his passion and fury.

‘A letter for you, Sir Cheyne,’ the concierge had said.

It was in a lady’s hand, foreign in style, and addressed to ‘Sir Ranald Cheyne, Hôtel St. Antoine, E.L.V.’ He opened it, and read the contents in tremulous haste.

‘Ailie—my own bird Ailie—it is about her, but *what?*’ he exclaimed, as his old eyes filled with salt tears. Then he covered his face with his hands, and added, hoarsely, ‘Oh, my child, my darling Ailie!’

He strove to rise from his chair, but fell faintly into the arms of the startled concierge.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE MARCH TO PRAH.

AND now, while Bevil Goring is lingering somewhat hopelessly in Antwerp, hearing nothing of Alison, and with all aim apparently taken out of his life, feeling how terrible is the unknown; and Laura Dalton and Bella Chevenix are counting the days of separation from those they love—the long-lost husband in one case, the mis-judged lover in the other—the transport with the Rifles on board, was running along the western coast of Africa, and some twenty days or so after the departure from Southampton saw her, with the rest of the sea and land armament, at anchor off the Gold Coast.

Save in so far as it concerns the adventures and fate of our friends Tony Dalton and Jerry Wilmot, we do not intend to write the story of how we fought there and marched to Coomassie, or what was the cause of the war, as there are never wanting old soldiers to tell the true tale of the fields in which they have fought.

Sir Richard Steele, that pleasing old essayist, in one of his fugitive papers gives us an amusing account of an ordinary in Holborn, where a veteran captain, furnished with a wooden leg, was never weary of telling long stories about the battle of Naseby, in which he had borne a part; and it is always the result of every battle or campaign of note to have survivors of it, who become perhaps after-dinner bores.

Thus the veterans of Blenheim and Malplacquet would hear with impatience the terrors of the great Civil War, but inflicted their reminiscences in turn on the victors of Dettingen and Culloden. So in turn the

heroes of the glorious Peninsula have now given place to those of Alma and Inkerman, and even their annals are fading now beside those of the luckless and disastrous fields of Southern Africa.

‘The Army is full of men with stories in their lives,’ said Dalton to Jerry one day, when talking of this very subject; ‘but I think, by Jove, that mine is an exceptionally strange one.’

Jerry, on the other hand, was thinking it strange that he should have proposed to his friend’s *wife*; but that fancy was all a thing of the past now, and—when his genuine love for Bella Chevenix was considered—seemed a phantasy, an absurdity, out of which the brilliant Laura had herself laughed him, and he had ceased to think of her before he ever thought hopefully of winning Bella; but surely love in these days of ours is not what it was a hundred years ago, when, as the author of ‘Guy Livingston’ has it, ‘our very school-girls smile at

the love-conceits which beguiled their granddames, even as *they* may have smiled at the philandering of Arcadia.'

New Year's Day, 1874, was to witness the landing of Sir Garnet Wolseley's expedition—army it could not be called—on the Gold Coast, consisting in all of about fifteen hundred men, exclusive of officers. The Black Watch—clad in grey for the first time since the regiment first mustered on the Birks of Aberfeldy, a hundred and forty years before—reckoned only nine hundred bayonets, nominally, with the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers and the Rifles, formed the infantry. The pipers alone wore the kilt.

Long before daybreak, the Rifles came ashore. The seamen of the ships of war and transports were supplied with lanterns, in case the landing should occur in the dark; but a brilliant moon, shining in a clear, blue, cloudless sky, rendered their use unnecessary, and the dark grey column, with its black accoutrements and tropical

helmets, was soon massed on the beach, and began its march alone under Colonel Arthur Warren—a veteran of Alma and the Eastern campaign—and long ere the sun of the tropical noon was high overhead, had marched seven miles on its route to the front; the rest of the troops, with the Naval Brigade, came on within five or six days, and the advance was continued towards the Prah. The troops did not—as the people at home curiously expected—proceed towards that now famous river by *railway*, as the materials which were brought out for its construction were not laid down, so ‘that wondrous jungle, with its foot-track, some twenty or thirty inches wide, between close walls of luxuriant greenery, swarming with strange and lovely birds, hateful reptiles, and monstrous insects, was not as yet to be disturbed by the locomotives steaming and screaming across the land.’

The troops marched without music. The pipes alone at times—playing the warlike

airs of other ages—woke the echoes of the path to Coomassie, scaring the turkey buzzards, the scavenger bird, and others of the feathered tribes in the far recesses of the dense primeval forests.

But there were some parts of the route where it lay through still and lifeless dells like those in the south of Scotland, without shelter, and then the fierce sun of Africa shone upon them with its pitiless glare, till rifle-barrels and sword-blades grew hot to the touch, and, like many others, Jerry Wilmot and Dalton sighed as they thought of iced champagne, of bitter beer ‘in its native pewter’ (as Dickens has it), and the flesh-pots of Aldershot.

But anon, near Accrofal, the march lay through groves of cotton-trees some two hundred and fifty feet high, like the giant vegetation of another world—trees with stems like the Duke of York’s column, as Sir Garnet Wolseley afterwards said—shutting out the sun from the wilderness of

bush below; and, as trees of other kinds were already shedding leaves, the men often marched more than ankle deep through fallen foliage.

The desertion of five thousand Fantee burden-bearers threw their task on the troops, who—the 42nd setting the example—carried the stores, in addition to their kits, arms, and accoutrements, with seventy rounds of ball cartridge, three ball-bags, haversacks, belts, bayonet, and Snider-Enfield rifle—terrible toil for white men in such a climate.

At each halting-place food was cooked by men in advance, and whenever a half-battalion came in it was fed at once, and the cooks went forward to the next. Jerry's man, O'Farrel, was 'invaluable as an improviser of grub,' as Jerry said, though his *cuisine* was somewhat inferior to the luxuries of the transport mess.

The first halt on New Year's night was at a place called Barraco, of which a party o

the Naval Brigade were the first to possess themselves, and there they were as hearty and happy as British sailors could be, as the whole campaign in the bush seemed to them but a spree ashore. But they were chiefly in their glory at night, when an enormous camp fire was kindled by them—a fire upon which the absolute and entire trunks of trees were heaped—throwing its flames skyward and its red light far into the recesses and dingles of the untrodden forest.

So on New Year's night, in that strange and isolated spot, were gathered the general and his staff, the sailors and their officers, and all made merry—the blue-jackets stepping forth in succession to sing their best, and often raciest, fore-castle songs.

On the next day's march, the second of January, the advanced guard raised a cheer.

'What's up?' asked Dalton—'the Ashantees in sight?'

'No,' replied an officer, 'but the Prah is—that famous river which they believe

no white man will ever be able to cross.'

Nevertheless, it was crossed that evening—the first man who stemmed its current being Lieutenant William Grant, of the 6th Regiment. It is sometimes called the Boossemprah, or river of St. John.

Swift and muddy-coloured, here it was rolling with great force between banks that were almost perpendicular—it was seventy yards wide and nine feet deep. The foliage on the banks was singularly beautiful, and there the stupendous cotton-trees were towering high in the air above a rich undergrowth of palms and plantains.

The troops crossed it by a pontoon bridge, and a trimly-hutted camp for three thousand men was speedily formed by the engineers, and then tents were pitched for Sir Garnet and his staff. Near them were parked the artillery under Captain Rait. It consisted of two batteries of steel guns, rifled muzzle-loaders, with one capable of throwing a seven-pound shell, or an oblong twelve-

pound shell—sources of unutterable terror to Ashantees. There was also a multiplying Gatling gun for musketry.

It was here that letters came from Koffee, the barbarous Ashantee king, expressive of a desire for peace, but not on such terms as the general could grant after having come so far; thus the advance on Coomassie, the capital, was still resolved on. The only written language of the people is Arabic, and the only persons who can write it are Moors; but their verbal language is the softest and most liquid on the Gold Coast, abounding in vowels and nearly destitute of aspirates.

The black and nearly nude ambassadors remained in camp for a brief time, and one of them, on seeing the practice of the Gatling gun, which sent streams of bullets in every direction to which its muzzle was turned, told his colleagues that 'it was vain to fight against foes so terribly armed.'

On this they taunted him with cowardice,

of which they threatened to inform King Koffee, and, knowing what his doom would be, the unfortunate creature shot himself, and was buried on his own side of the river, when each Ashantee, in accordance with some ancient custom, threw a handful of dust on his body and took their departure.

It was evident that there would soon be fighting now. 'Sir Garnet's demands were that the king must release all European prisoners' (of whom he had several), 'pay £200,000 for the cost of the war, and sign in presence of our forces a treaty securing firmly the British Protectorate from future aggression. Private warnings, however, and the information gained by Lord Gifford and Major Russel in their scouting advance beyond the Prah, caused Sir Garnet to distrust completely all the king's overtures for peace.'

On the night after the dusky ambassadors had departed, Tony Dalton had command of an out-piquet in the direction of the

enemy, and as the sunset passed away he had, as in duty bound, examined carefully all the ground in his vicinity.

A night piquet, especially in a wood and in a savage country, is always a post of danger. By day sentries can see about them more or less, but not so in the gloom of night, and in a jungly wilderness where savages might creep upon them unawares—even past or between them—and cut the piquet off. Hence no man thought of sleeping, and Dalton had at least one connecting sentry on the narrow track that led to the front where his line was posted.

The pipers of the Black Watch, playing tattoo in the hutted camp, had made the mighty woods of the Prah re-echo to the notes of the ‘Pibroch of Donuil Dhu,’ its last notes had died away in the leafy dingles, and as silence stole over the plain Dalton gave way to thought.

The war in which he was engaged had been stigmatised as one against savages, but

they were savages who were far from being feeble foes ; and if (as a print of the time said) 'by honour and glory is meant the creditable performance of duty at the call of the State, then is that just as applicable to soldiers and sailors who fight savages as to those engaged in the more showy scenes of European war. Her Majesty's troops do not pick and choose either the enemies they have to encounter, or the regions wherein their valour and fortitude are to be displayed ; and it is unjust to shower laurels on one set of men, while another, equally employed in defending our empire, are deprived of due recognition.'

It was with a consciousness of this—the high sense of duty—that our troops landed cheerfully on the perilous Gold Coast ; yet Dalton, like many of his comrades, had been elsewhere engaged in 'the big wars that make ambition virtue,' and he felt that this Ashanti strife, though a petty one, was fraught with many dangers peculiar to itself.

Would he escape them, and yet be spared to enjoy the society of the now brilliant and beautiful Laura and their sweet little daughter? How hard if the bullet of a naked savage deprived him of that double joy, and gave him a grave amid the eternal forest that spread from the Prah to Coomassie!

He tried to shun this thought—that almost *fear*, which came to his naturally gallant spirit—but failed. It *would* come again and again, with a persistency that troubled him; for life seemed dearer, sweeter now, than it had ever been before. He never thought of sleep, but indulged in waking dreams of scenes and faces far away in pleasant Hampshire, and in hopes that the wild work would soon be over, and hideous Coomassie won.

The night wind was whispering among rushes and reeds of wondrous growth, or stirring the foliage of the cotton-trees, between which could be seen the stars—con-

stellations unknown in our northern hemisphere; and he could hear the ripple of the Prah as it poured between its banks on its way to St. Sebastian, the chirp of enormous insects, the twitter of brilliantly plumaged birds, scared by the red gleams of the watch-fire. Round the latter were the men of the picket, in their grey Ashanti uniforms and tropical helmets, in groups, sitting or lying beside their piled rifles, the barrels of which reflected the sheen of the flames.

As Dalton looked and listened, he felt as one in a dream, amid surroundings so strange, and far over the seas his heart seemed to go, to where no doubt at that hour little Netty, his daughter—*his daughter*, how strangely it sounded!—was sleeping by her mother's side 'like a callow cygnet in its nest'—Netty so recently found, one of whose existence he had been so long ignorant.

The two tresses of hair he had got in such hot haste at Southampton were many

a time drawn forth from the breast-pocket of his Ashanti patrol-jacket, to be tenderly unfolded, kissed, and replaced, for as yet no locket had been procured in which to enshrine them, and such an ornament was not likely to be procured among the reed-built wigwams of Coomassie.

Not far from him lay Jerry Wilmot, indulging in thoughts of his own—wondering on what terms were now Bella Chevenix and haughty Lady Julia Wilmot, his cold and heartless mother, who had seen him depart from his father's house to face peril, disease, toil, and, it might be, death, so callously!

Adjacent to Dalton's post was many a horrid souvenir of the hasty retreat made across the Prah by the army of King Koffee, by torchlight, on the night of the 29th of the preceding November, when three hundred men perished. On the skirts of our camp—the foreshore of the Prah—their festering corpses lay in scores, and

many that were half skeletons hung curiously and terribly from the branches of trees that arched over the stream. In one place a dead Ashanti sat propped against the stem of a palm-tree, with his head between his hands and his elbows on his knees; around him lay heaps of bones, among which the turkey buzzards waddled. All these men had perished by having failed to achieve a passage by the use of their rope bridge.

Suddenly the sound of musketry close by, ringing out sharply upon the air of the silent night, made the whole picket start to their feet.

‘Stand to!’ cried Dalton, drawing his sword. ‘Unpile!’ was the next order, and the picket faced its line of sentries.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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